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Life beyond COVID-19

The latest developments in the GCC



United Arab Emirates

Latest updates

On 29 October 2021, the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism announced new preventative measures for attending events and exhibitions in Abu Dhabi to keep participants safe from COVID-19. Effective 29 October, individuals wishing to enter public events and exhibitions are required to show a negative PCR test that is not more than 96 hours old, wearing face masks is also mandatory and thermal screenings at all entry points.

Requirement of face masks

The UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention announced in September 2021 a relaxation to the rules on wearing masks in some public places. Masks are now no longer required in the following circumstances:

- While exercising outside, at the beach or by the pool.
- In a car with people from the same household.
- Indoors alone.
- At barber shops or salons.
- Whilst undergoing diagnosis or treatment at medical centres.
- When seated at restaurants (but not when walking around).
- Whilst eating and drinking at the cinema.

Abu Dhabi Circular No. 19 of 2021 concerning employee attendance at private sector workplaces in Abu Dhabi (Circular 19)

Circular 19 permits 100% attendance at the workplace for private sector companies commencing 7 September 2021.

United Arab Emirates

Latest updates

Abu Dhabi Authorities Announcement – September 2021

Government entities have been mandated to undertake the following commencing 5 September 2021:

- Return to 100% workplace capacity.
- Vaccinated employees, and those exempt from taking the vaccination are required to show a green status on the UAE Alhosn electronic app.
- Unvaccinated employees and those exempt from taking the vaccine are required to present a negative PCR test once every seven days.
- Vaccinated employees are required to present a negative PCR test once every 30 days.
- All employees will need to follow the government's COVID-19 testing requirements.
- Employees failing to comply with the PCR testing requirements will not be allowed to work and their absence will be deducted from their annual leave or monthly salary.
- Vaccinated visitors and customers must show the green status on the Alhosn app. Those unvaccinated must show a negative PCR test result taken within 48 hours prior to entry.
- Remote working permitted for one parent of a child in grade 10 or below, who is exempt from in-person school attendance based on medical authorisation and a statement from the educational institution. Employers may grant additional authorisation based on government regulations.

Latest updates

Abu Dhabi Authorities announcement – August 2021

On 19 August 2021, the Abu Dhabi authorities have mandated the following measures effective 20 August 2021:

- Entry into most public places restricted to those who are vaccinated and those having a green status on the AlHosn app, (which appears after a negative PCR test result and remains active for 30 days). This applies to residents and visitors.
- Those exempt from vaccination will get a green status on AlHosn app for seven days after a negative PCR test result.
- Children under 16 years will have a green status without the need for a test.
- Unvaccinated individuals and those with grey status on AlHosn app (which reflects an expired PCR test) are prohibited from entering public places.
- Those with a new residency permit have a grace period of 60 days to get vaccinated.
- To maintain the vaccinated status on AlHosn app, a booster dose must be taken six months after receiving the second dose. A grace period of 30 days is given. (Participants in vaccine trials are exempt from needing a booster dose.)
- Public spaces include shopping centres, restaurants, cafes, and all other retail outlets, including those not within a shopping centre, as well as gyms, recreational facilities and sporting activities, health clubs, resorts, museums, cultural centres and theme parks.
- The list also includes universities, institutes, public and private schools and children's nurseries in the emirate.
- A grace period of 30 days applies to all those who have taken their second dose more than six months ago, before their status will turn grey on 20 September 2021.
- Shopping malls, entertainment centres, cultural centres, museums, and movie theatres will operate at 80 per cent capacity.
- Capacity in restaurants and cafes has increased to 80%, allowing up to 10 people to sit at one table. Face masks must be worn when not dining.
- Health clubs, sports academies, gyms, and spas will operate at 50% capacity.
- Community and sport events can accommodate 60%. This capacity also applies to exhibitions and conferences, and entertainment events including theatre plays and concerts.
- Wedding halls can operate at 60% capacity, with a maximum of 100 guests.
- Public transportation can operate at 75% capacity.
- A taxi driver can travel with up to three passengers in a five-person taxi and four passengers in a seven-person taxi.

Latest updates

Abu Dhabi Circular No. 4 of 2021 as amended by Circular No. 5 of 2021 updating the procedures of combating COVID-19 in government entities and companies (Circular 4)

Government entities were mandated to undertake various measures pursuant to these circulars commencing 30 May 2021. However many of the requirements that were mandated by Circular 4, as amended by Circular 5 have been superseded by the latest announcements from the Abu Dhabi authorities, as set out above. We set out below some requirements that have not been superseded or officially repealed:

- Contacts of an infected person and individuals returning from overseas are required to quarantine as instructed. Such period shall be:
 - Classed as remote working in instances where the individual has received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccination or has a certified medical report stating that they are not eligible to receive the vaccine.
 - Deducted from annual leave or unpaid leave where the individual does not have sufficient leave balance, in instances where the individual is unvaccinated.
- Apply occupational health and safety standards, manuals, and instructions, as well as physical distancing and precautionary and preventive health measures deemed necessary and issued by the competent entities.
- Submit monthly reports to the Abu Dhabi Human Resources Authority about the developments of the implementation of the provisions of the Circular.

Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization PCR testing requirements

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization in a Tweet announced on 22 March 2021 that effective 28 March 2021, unvaccinated employees in hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, laundries, beauty salons, and hairdressers are required to take a PCR test once every 14 days.

Saudi Arabia

Latest updates

Requirement of face masks

The KSA Ministry of Interior announced on 17 October 2021 that wearing masks is no longer mandatory in open places. Furthermore, those who have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are not subject to social distancing measures at social gatherings, public places, public transport, restaurants, and cinemas. These spaces will be permitted to operate at full capacity.

Tawakkalna app

The KSA authorities launched the Tawakkalna app in 2020 as a contact tracing application to help track COVID-19 infections. The app has been updated to include vaccination and infection status. Use of the app is mandatory in order to be granted access to public places such as hotels, malls, and restaurants.

Ministry of Interior Announcement and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Guidance

The Ministry of Interior issued a statement stating that effective 1 August 2021, individuals will only be permitted entry into the workplace (government, private, and not for profit), public and private establishments if they have received two doses of one of the KSA authorities approved COVID-19 vaccination.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has since issued guidance to employers on how to deal with unvaccinated employees. The guidance provides that employees who remain unvaccinated as at 9 August 2021 who cannot work remotely will be required to exhaust their annual leave, then unpaid leave, and thereafter their employment will be suspended pursuant to the provisions of the Labour Law.

Decision of The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development No. 192891 Of 1442H approving the implementing regulations of the social security law (Cabinet Decision No. 211 of 1442H (corresponding to 17.11.2020)) setting out the process and eligibility for social security assistance

In June 2021, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development issued the Implementing Regulations to the Social Security law. The Implementing Regulations set out the process and eligibility for social security assistance.

Assistance is available to KSA nationals who are permanent residents in the Kingdom who meet certain eligibility criteria.

In assessing the applicant's eligibility for assistance, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development consider the various income streams the applicant or family (depending if the application is for a single applicant or a family unit) have available.

Latest updates

Decision No. 575 of 1442H applying a job seekers subsidy

The law allows those who qualify to benefit from 15 months of job seeker benefits in the following amount:

- SAR 2,000 / month for the first 4 months
- SAR 1,500 / month for the next 4 months
- SAR 1,000 / month for the next 4 months
- SAR 750 / month for the last 3 months

Applicants have to fulfil various eligibility criteria, including a requirement to be a KSA national, a requirement to be a permanent resident, must be searching for a job, be between the age of 20-40 years, must not be employed in private or public sector, must not be in receipt of a KSA retirement pension scheme or unemployment benefit or compensation (Sanad), must not be in education or training (as defined in the law), must not have a business, the individual's monthly income or wealth must not exceed a certain threshold (to be outlined in the implementing regulations which are yet to be issued), and must not have benefitted from the job seeker benefit in the past (unless only partial benefit was received). Various application restrictions must also be met.

Qatar

Latest updates

Ehteraz app

The Qatar authorities have introduced a compulsory contact tracing application called 'Ehteraz'. The app operates a colour coded tier system which shows the user's health information and vaccination status gathered by official authorities; the information is updated centrally. The different colours reflect the following information:

- Red – for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and remain positive.
- Yellow – for individuals who are or should be isolating or in quarantine facilities.
- Grey – suspected cases, individuals who exhibit symptoms or who have been in contact with COVID-19 positive cases but have not yet been tested.
- Green – healthy individuals who do not exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms or who have tested negative.

Many public places, such as retail shops, banks, public institutions, and workplaces have mandated sight of a “green” health status on the Ehteraz app prior to entering.

Qatar entry requirements

All entrants (apart from Qatari nationals and residents) must complete and submit their travel details through the Ehteraz online portal.

Oman

Latest updates

Night curfew

Effective from 21 August 2021 the night-time curfew in place from 10pm-4am has been removed.

Vaccination requirements

Effective 1 September 2021, entry into government offices, supermarkets, restaurants, and commercial establishments will only be granted to those who can evidence that they have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Such requirement applies to shopping malls from 15 September 2021. Evidence of the vaccine can be shown using Oman's Tarassud+ app.

Travel

Commencing 1 September 2021, Omani citizens, resident visa holders and visitors are permitted entry into Oman regardless of their departure country and without prior approval.

Travelers over the age of 18 must be fully vaccinated to enter the country and must present a medical certificate evidencing that they received the last dose 14 days prior to entering the country. Some exemptions apply. Non-vaccinated Oman resident permit holders are permitted entry subject to seven days mandatory institutional quarantine on arrival.

Quarantine exemptions apply as follows:

- Those with a negative PCR test undertaken 96 hours prior to departure; and travelling on flights eight hours or more.
- Those with a negative PCR test undertaken 72 hours prior to departure; and travelling on flights less than eight hours.

Institutional quarantine continues to apply to all passengers arriving from the Republic of Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Bahrain

Latest updates

Travel

Travel Entry to Bahrain is currently restricted to Bahraini citizens and residents, GCC citizens who don't need visas, and passengers eligible to obtain a visa on arrival or an eVisa, diplomats, military personnel, airline crew, or holders of official, service, or UN passports. Bahraini citizens and those holding a valid residence visa in Bahrain are permitted entry to Bahrain from red list countries (currently there are 16). On entry, such passengers (aged 6 and above) must present a negative PCR test taken within 48 hours prior to departure, conduct a PCR test on arrival, quarantine for 10 days, and undertake tests on day 5 and 10 after arrival. Passengers aged 6 and above arriving from non-red list countries must comply with the following protocols:

- Vaccinated passengers and those who have recovered from the virus 8 months after infection (exceptions apply):
 - Conduct a PCR test on arrival
 - Conduct a PCR test on day 5 and 10 after arrival
 - No requirement to present a PCR test before boarding
 - No quarantine requirements
- Unvaccinated passengers:
 - Present a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours prior to departure
 - Conduct a PCR test on arrival
 - Quarantine for 10 days (12 years and above)
 - Conduct PCR tests on day 5 and 10

All passengers arriving in Bahrain are required to download and activate the 'BeAware Bahrain' application and sign an agreement to self-isolate, which requires them to quarantine at their place of residence until their arrival test results are available.

Vaccination requirements

Effective 3 September 2021, vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals are permitted access to shops, swimming pools, malls, gyms, and restaurants.

Entry into cinemas, conferences, events, and indoor sporting events remain open only to those who can evidence that they have been vaccinated, or those who have recovered from COVID-19. Children under 12 are exempt.

Latest updates

Decision No. 68 of 2019 Regarding the Wages Protection Scheme and Decision No. 22 of 2021 Regarding the Stages of Implementing the Wages Protection Scheme

The wage protection scheme was introduced in July 2019 and in March 2021 mandatory compliance was phased in with the first phase applying to employers with 500 employees or more. The second phase, applicable to employers with 50-499 employees, came into effect on 1st September 2021. It is understood that employers facing technical difficulties with the system will not be penalised for failing to meet the requirements during the first six months.

Three-year National Labour Market Plan

The Government of Bahrain announced in July 2021 their three year National Labour Market Plan which seeks to transform the labour market by promoting and creating employment opportunities for Bahraini citizens, increasing the private sector's contribution to the country's economic growth and strengthening the existing regulatory framework. The plan is scheduled to be implemented by 2023, and its focus is on education and training, improving employment skills, determining areas where there are skill shortages and hiring foreign nationals for such roles, increasing investment in digital transformation and technology, integrating Bahraini female nationals into the workplace, reviewing and enhancing the nationalisation framework.

Kuwait

Latest updates

Vaccination requirements

Entry into malls, restaurants, cafes, gyms, health clubs, salons, parks, and cultural facilities has been restricted to those who can evidence that they have been vaccinated against COVID-19 through 'My Identity' or 'Immunity' mobile application from June 2021. Children under the age of 16 are exempt.

Travel

Effective 1 August 2021, fully vaccinated non-Kuwaiti residents may return to Kuwait. 'Fully vaccinated' has been determined to mean those in receipt of two doses of the Kuwait-approved Pfizer, Oxford Astra Zeneca, or Moderna vaccines, or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Unvaccinated children below 16 can enter with eligible parents.

In order to be approved, the vaccine must be registered with the Kuwait Ministry of Health 'Immune' mobile application or on the Mobile Civil ID application. Once registered the individual's status on the app will appear in green.

Arriving passengers must also register with the Kuwait Mosafer platform which manages PCR tests, and the Ministry of Health communication app, Shlonik, prior to boarding the aircraft.

All travellers must present proof of a negative PCR test taken with 72 hours prior to departure. Mandatory seven-day quarantine applies, with early release given once the PCR test taken on arrival comes back negative.

440

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Lawyers

4,000

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