

# Return to Office Phase I

## COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

October 2021



The purpose of this FAQs is to provide information on questions and concerns that may arise during the gradual return to office at the ESCAP premises for Phase I.

ESCAP's approach to gradually return to the office has been closely guided by the health and safety recommendations adopted by the Royal Thai Government; the decisions of the COVID-19 Contingency Management Team (CCMT) Thailand; and the [UN Medical Director's risk management framework for decision makers](#).

Furthermore, the multi-layered risk mitigation measures for the Return to Office (UN Building) planning is based on the principle of People-centered Business Continuity planning.

### 1. What are the modalities in place when one wants to enter the premises? What is the rationale for health-declaration when entering the premises?

**Answer:** When entering the premises, personnel and external visitors, including meeting participants, (herewith referred to as individual(s)), are subject to a health declaration to confirm that they have not tested positive to COVID-19 in the last 10 days, have not had symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in the last 10 days, have not had close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days and accept to comply with the infection prevention measures in place.

The rationale for requesting the health declaration is that it serves as another layer of mitigating measures to ensure the safety and health of everyone in the ESCAP premises. This will help serve as a continuous reminder to all individuals that if they or a household member feel unwell or had an exposure to a positive case, they SHOULD NOT go to the office.

To further simplify the process, two modalities have been introduced: (i) for valid UN identity pass holders, by swiping the pass the individual(s) confirms the health declaration; (ii) for non-UN issued identity pass holders, the health-declaration form will need to be filled accordingly (Link for [Health-Declaration Form](#)).

### 2. How does the clearance process from the health declaration work?

**Answer:** In the health declaration, all individuals are asked to give information that helps assess their risk of COVID-19 exposure. If one submits via the self-declaration form of having symptoms consistent with, or tested positive for, COVID-19, or close contact with a COVID-19 positive case, the individual will receive an email notification stating that their access cannot be cleared, and that they should get in touch with UN Medical Service to obtain further guidance on the next actions. In

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cases where the individual was not given clearance to access the premises but requires to urgently have access due to “essential/critical” work reasons, they can contact Medical Service for an urgent medical evaluation and possible clearance on the same day on an exceptional basis.

### 3. Who is reviewing the health declaration form?

**Answer:** The Medical Service Unit (MSU) is reviewing the health declaration submittal via the self-declaration form. Medical information can only be accessed by the medical professionals in MSU.

### 4. Any special measures on tracking and monitoring the health-declaration submittal via the self-declaration form, etc.?

**Answer:** Regarding the monitoring mechanism, submissions indicating risk exposure will be reviewed by the Medical Service Unit (MSU) personnel; additional monitoring may be undertaken by the medical personnel by randomly checking submissions. Please refer to section IV in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the Health Declaration Process During Phase I (Annex B).

### 5. Was the health-declaration that ESCAP uses recommended by the CCMT?

**Answer:** Health-declaration was discussed and considered by the CCMT as part of “Multi-layered Risk Mitigation/Protection Measures”

### 6. Will contractors working on premises be required to have full vaccination status?

**Answer:** Applying different vaccination requirements for institutional contractors (long-term contractors co-existing in the Premises) was considered as a non-discriminatory measure. This is due to the different relationship or contractual arrangement with the UN and is an integral part of the COVID-19 response plan of the contractors.

Based on the detailed stock-taking of the current and incoming institutional contractors, we are assured that the majority of ESCAP's contracted personnel has either reached full vaccination status or in progress to attain it, prior to their functions being resumed on-site.

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### 7. Why is it important to assess the vaccination status of people entering the premises?

**Answer:** In the context of local infection rates, vaccination against COVID-19 is a key strategy for preventing COVID-19 infections and transmission in the workplace setting.

According to the [UN Medical Directors advisory](#), a fully vaccinated person (2 weeks after their final dose) has a low chance of contracting COVID-19, of being affected if they do get it, or of passing it on to others. Knowing the vaccination status of all personnel is therefore key to developing a Return to Office response plan that ensures duty of care for all occupants to determine the most appropriate risk mitigation measures to be in place, while ensuring a responsive business continuity plan.

Please refer to Q. 10 and Annex A for information on the process to disclose vaccination status.

### 8. For Phase I, do individuals entering the premises need to be fully vaccinated to enter the ESCAP premises?

**Answer:** For Phase I, vaccination is not mandatory to enter the premises for the time being. However, Secretariat entities including ESCAP await delegated authority from UNHQ to mandate vaccination for categories of staff performing certain tasks and in certain occupation groups whose functions are deemed to not allow sufficient management of exposure to COVID-19 and who may therefore be required to be vaccinated in order to fulfil their role.

In the meantime, all individuals requiring entry to the UN premises are strongly recommended to be vaccinated and personnel must disclose their vaccination status. For COVID-19 confirmed and recovered cases (not exceeding 3-month period after release from isolation), these are considered under vaccination status and can enter the premises.

### 9. Is the vaccination status a medically confidential information?

**Answer:** According to the [UN Medical Directors consensus opinion](#), vaccination status is sensitive information, but not medical-in-confidence, and the workplace may ask personnel to disclose their vaccination status in order to effectively manage exposure risk in the workplace. In the context of ESCAP premises, and in

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consideration of the local health situation, all personnel must disclose their vaccination status which will allow better assessment of risk at the workplace and understand the level of risk mitigation measures that are needed.

Vaccine status information of individuals will only be accessed by medical professional in Medical Service Unit. They will provide statistical data to ESCAP administration and the CCMT without identifying names for reporting and analysis purposes. This will assist in the further development and refinement of risk mitigation and protective measures for all users of the premises.

### 10. What is the process to report my COVID-19 vaccination status for Phase I?

**Answer:** ALL staff members– vaccinated or not vaccinated- in the **UN Secretariat, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, UNOPS, WIPO, IAEA, UNIDO, UNU, ITC and CTBTO** must report their vaccination status (full, partial or unvaccinated) through the **Earthmed portal** (<https://medical.un.org/earthmedportal/>). Refer to the step-by-step guide in Annex A.

For all other UN personnel who do not belong to the agencies listed above, hence cannot access the Earthmed portal, are to report their vaccination status (full, partial or unvaccinated) by email to the UN Medical Service: [bkkmedservice@un.org](mailto:bkkmedservice@un.org).

All UN personnel are requested to submit their vaccination status by 15 November 2021.

### 11. What is the mandate of UN ESCAP to ask other UN Agencies located in ESCAP compound to share this information?

**Answer:** The request for personnel to disclose their vaccination status was made in consultation with CCMT which is co-chaired by the RC and DO, and in alignment with UN entities making disclosure of vaccination status mandatory for personnel across the board.

The request falls within the Memorandum of Understanding between ESCAP and UN Agencies located in ESCAP compound, which states "The Lessee shall comply with and undertakes that its staff, contractors, agents and visitors shall obey all safety and security regulations now or hereafter established by ESCAP's Division of Administration or Security and Safety Section for the United Nations Building as well as other rules relating to access to the United Nations Building then in effect". Thus, ESCAP may



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activate safety regulations, in the interest of all occupants, accordingly.

The key indicator for decision making and associated assessment is the aggregate figure of those vaccinated vis-a-vis not vaccination. The entity can provide this information in a number of ways and or in a combination of ways: (a) request and direct staff to the Earthmed system; (b) request and direct staff to disclose vaccination status to the UNESCAP Medical Service Unit; (c) entity collects information and submits aggregate figure with ESCAP DA periodically.

Please be ensured that vaccination status disclosure will be accessed only by medical professional in Medical Service Unit. For ESCAP, all medical personnel are bound by medical confidentiality and have signed confidentiality agreements.

### 12. Who will be allowed to access the premises upon implementation of Phase I?

**Answer:** Please see below:

- UN staff members / personnel – Only essential staff / critical personnel authorized by Heads of Agencies (with UN ID badges)
- Contractors – Prior request for authorization / permission is required
- Delegates – Prior request for authorization / permission is required
- Meeting participants – Prior request for authorization / permission is required
- UN retirees – for Phase I, UN retirees are not encouraged to enter the premises except for critical personnel of AFICS Thailand undertaking critical administrative tasks or for essential banking services that cannot be conducted online (prior authorization is needed).
- External visitors – It is strongly encouraged to restrict the access of visitors to the premises, including dependents and children. Contravening this recommendation erodes the effectiveness of COVID-19 preventive measures, and it may unnecessarily have adverse impact on the health of all occupants and community members.

### 13. What and who constitutes 'essential functions?' Who determines such, in view of 29 entities in ESCAP premises?

**Answer:** Each of the 29 UN entities based within the ESCAP premises is to determine, in view of their program criticality, the essential functions that can only be conducted

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on-site during Phase I.

Further to the WHO Thailand advisory, UNDSS guidance for UN entities to harmonize an understanding of essential functions strongly recommends that for Phase I, the footprint up to 20% - 25% range is designed to cater for surge critical program functions, such as humanitarian operations, that can only be conducted on-site.

For example, for ESCAP, it should be limited to the staff performing functions that require physical presence in the premises, for example for participation on a high-level meeting, security, oversight of construction works or activities that require on-site oversight etc.

All managers are to exercise extreme caution and take a conservative approach to determine essential functions based on prioritized program criticality.

**14. For vaccine passport (yellow book) holders and international staff who do not use the Thai Mor Prom mobile application, can they submit vaccination certificates issued by the hospital? Or does it mean that international staff are also suggested to register in Mor Prom, and download vaccine certificate there?**

**Answer:** The yellow book is important and can be useful for travelling. As to individual country's requirements, which changes rapidly, we recommend seeking clarification from the respective embassy or border control of the destination country closer to the time of travel.

As for the *Mor Prom* certificate, it is the standard practice in Thailand to verify vaccination status using this app which also includes a QR code. While hospital medical certificates from a Thailand hospital are likely to be accepted, again, it will depend on the facility that is implementing access control on what is recognized. For non-Thai nationals, one way is to obtain the *Mor Prom* certificate from the medical facility where they received the vaccine. If this cannot be done (as it takes time to update the system), individuals can download the certificate with the CID number on their hospital vaccination record.

For more information on recording COVID-19 vaccinations into a Yellow Book, please refer to Annex A.

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### 15. I was vaccinated outside Thailand. How can I get the COVID-19 vaccination certificate details transcribed in my yellow vaccination book?

**Answer:** Staff who received at least one vaccination dose outside Thailand that was not recorded in the yellow vaccination book, can request to transfer vaccine certificate details by presenting the original vaccination certificate and the yellow book to their entity's supporting Medical Services Unit. After verifying the validity of the original vaccination certificate, medical personnel will record the vaccination dose(s) in the yellow book, sign, and stamp on behalf of the original vaccine administrator.

Thai authorities have indicated that only those vaccine doses that were administered in Thailand will be recorded in the Thai COVID-19 vaccination passport. Hence, ESCAP Medical Service will prioritize requests from those who either (a) obtained at least one dose of the vaccine outside of Thailand, or (b) urgently need to travel outside of Thailand. Requests for transfer of the vaccine certificate details into the yellow book will be strictly by appointment only, through sending an email request to [bkkmedservice@un.org](mailto:bkkmedservice@un.org). In Phase 1, requests will be accommodated on a limited basis only, in due consideration to the footprint management in the ESCAP premises. For those who do not have a yellow vaccination book, a copy of such can be downloaded via this link: [https://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200\\_06\\_26.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf?ua=1)

### 16. What is the definition of “fully vaccinated”?

**Answer:** A person is considered fully vaccinated 14 days after having received the final dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccine.

### 17. Can I be exempted from receiving the COVID-19 vaccination?

**Answer:** Exemptions to receiving the COVID-19 vaccination can only be made on medical grounds. Exemption to vaccinations requirement, including for those recovering from COVID-19 and who cannot receive the vaccine immediately, should be requested through the staff entity's medical service. Each entity is to consult the HoA(s) to further discuss in view of their own HR policy/guidance.

### 18. Why should I wear a mask at all times in the premises?

**Answer:** Mask wearing – along with physical distancing and regular hand-sanitizing – are mitigation measures required to ensure a safe work environment for all personnel. A characteristic of the delta variant, which is currently the most predominant strain circulating in Thailand, is that it's a highly transmissible virus,

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hence, mask wearing by all is considered particularly effective in decreasing transmission. Further, although COVID-19 vaccines are very effective in preventing death and severe disease, it does not provide 100% protection against infection. Therefore, all personnel, irrespective of their vaccination status, are required to wear masks at all times (including at workstations) when indoors at the UN premises.

### **19. What safety / COVID prevention measures are in place for the ongoing Seismic Mitigation Project (SMP) logistics move and construction works?**

**Answer:** Under the SMP contracts, COVID-19 response plans are in place in line with all UN guiding principles / government regulations.

The plans outline the COVID-19 prevention and control measures for personnel working on-site; and aim to minimize the effect of COVID-19 on UN personnel and individuals within the premise. As part of the control measures in construction sites during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to ensure that contractors are protecting their workers and minimizing the risk of spread of infection.

Thus, from 18th October onwards, employees of the contractors must be fully vaccinated, and tested regularly for COVID-19 with ATK test before joining the project site.

### **20. What services are available at the compound during Phase I?**

**Answer:** Catering services, banking services, medical clinic, post office, garage operations, souvenir shop, host country-related services will be available under restricted measures and in accordance with the established stringent COVID-19 response measures.

### **21. Does the Return to Office planning and compliance matter for entities outside the ESCAP compound? How does it cater to the entities operating outside the ESCAP compound?**

**Answer:** The multi-layered risk mitigation/protection measures are designed and endorsed by CCMT for the safety and health for all UN system personnel and occupants of the Premises.

As several COVID-19 safety measures are access control measures, entities that are co-located in ESCAP compound are required to follow the safety protocol in place and adhere to the Occupational Safety and Health plan. Any applicable exemption is at the discretion of the HoAs, who in turn is requested to update/inform ESCAP DA.



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For the entities that are outside ESCAP compound, it is recommended to use the guidance as reference along with the entity's own administrative policy and guidance, host country measures, and entry protocol.

Noting that each entity has its own criteria and facing different circumstances, full harmonization proves difficult for the Return to Office plan.

### 22. What are the current travel regulations in place for entering the Kingdom of Thailand?

**Answer:** The travel regulations are constantly evolving, please refer to the UN Returnees BKK ([https://mailchi.mp/un/un\\_returneesbkk](https://mailchi.mp/un/un_returneesbkk)) for the latest updates and announcements on travel regulations prior to arriving or leaving Thailand.

### 23. What happens if a staff member that was in the office suspects that he/she is infected with COVID-19?

**Answer:** Anyone who is already feeling unwell in the morning should not leave home to go to work. This simple measure will effectively prevent workplace transmission at the first instance. If a staff member suspects that they may have been infected and has been in the office, they should immediately report to the Medical Unit by email: [bkkmedservice@un.org](mailto:bkkmedservice@un.org). Medical unit will conduct a risk assessment to determine if the person is a likely case of COVID-19. If the assessment is confirmed as positive, Medical Unit will launch contact tracing by requesting the staff to provide all their workplace contacts from 48 hours before symptom onset (or positive COVID-19 test result for asymptomatic cases) and contacts will be informed of the possible exposure without disclosing the staff member's personal information. Facilities Management Unit (FMU)/ESCAP DA colleagues will also be informed so that at-risk areas in the workplace are cleaned and disinfected. Please see attached under Annex B, Contact Tracing SOP.

### 24. What measures should be considered when commuting to the office?

**Answer:** Below recommendations to be observed when commuting to the office:

#### Commute by own vehicle

- Parking reserved for staff members with own vehicles
- Thermal screening upon access to the premises
- Avoid car-pooling.

#### Commute by Taxi, Grab

- Taxis should be relatively safe but are enclosed spaces
- Wear a mask
- Experts

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recommend sitting behind the driver: you are also less likely to have droplets land on you should the driver cough or sneeze • Taking Grab will enable cash-/card-less payment and decrease need for interaction and exchange of money • Avoid sharing a taxi with others • Do not use taxi/Grab when feeling unwell • Thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water at the end of the journey.

### **Commute by BTS, MRT, Bus, Khlong Boat**

- Travelling at off-peak hours to avoid crowds
- Look for quiet areas and practice physical distancing (2 meters distance between you and fellow passengers)
- Be mindful of droplets deposited on surfaces including poles, handles, seats, hand-rests and the escalator/stairs handrail
- Wear a mask (and possibly gloves)
- Avoid touching hand, nose and mouth
- Do not use public transport when feeling unwell
- Thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water at the end of the journey.

Commute by Motorcycle Taxi is not advised.

## **25. What cleaning protocols are in place for the premises?**

**Answer:** There are cleaning protocols in place to ensure adherence to strict hygiene standards. The following are implemented:

During the regular cleaning, restrooms, and other common areas (e.g., elevators, cafeteria, seating areas, etc.) are sanitized daily or more, depending on density of traffic.

Cleaning and sanitizing of frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, elevator buttons, stairway rails, etc.) will be done several times throughout the day, ensuring that all surfaces are sanitized at a maximum of 4-hour intervals.

Hand sanitizers are being made available on every floor near the elevators and staircases and at building entrances.

A deep-cleaning and sanitizing protocol will be followed in case of confirmation of a COVID-19 case among personnel who have been present on the premises.

For more information on cleaning protocols in place, please refer to Annex B – SOP Cleaning.

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## ANNEX A

[COVID-19 Vaccination Status Reporting Guide](#)

[COVID-19 Recording of COVID-19 vaccinations into a Yellow Book](#)

## ANNEX B

**Key Standard Operating Procedures (among other established SOPs)**

[Standard Operating Procedure for Health Declaration](#)

[Standard Operating Procedure for Contact Tracing](#)

[Standard Operating Procedure for Cleaning](#)