

Covid infection manifesting into long-term problem

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Some companies are facing difficulties with the transition from work-from-home to work-from-office among employees due to Long Covid.

PETALING JAYA: About 10% to 15% of those who have contracted Covid-19 go on to experience the symptoms long after they have been given the all clear.

More than two years after the global pandemic began, the post-Covid phenomenon, also known as Long Covid, is beginning to manifest itself in life and work, and with it come various problems.

Those with Long Covid suffer from shortness of breath, cough, chest pains and lethargy, according to Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Murugan Raj.

For their employers, it means loss in productivity and increased medical costs.

People who have been infected with Covid-19 can experience new, returning or ongoing symptoms for weeks or even months after their have recovered from the initial infection, Murugan told FMT Business.

He said those who never took the Covid-19 vaccine or had a severe infection were at higher risk of suffering from Long Covid later.

He noted that Long Covid could lead to difficulties in carrying out routine daily activities, a factor that has now become a cause for concern for businesses, especially the small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

According to a report in The Edge last year, more than a third of Long Covid sufferers who responded to a survey reported that they had to take leave or to work fewer hours in the day.

For businesses, it means additional problems, from added cost to delays in meeting targets.

Small and Medium Enterprises Association (Samenta) chairman William Ng noted that workers were already having a hard time making the transition from working at home back to working at the office.

Long Covid is only making that change more difficult and, according to Ng, there is a general lethargy at the workplace after two years of lockdown.

He expressed concern that this could lead to more sick days and lower productivity.

"This is a reality that we must deal with now," he said, a reflection of the severity of the new challenge businesses face now.

FMT Business understands that there has yet to be any comprehensive data on the incidence of Long Covid, but Ng said steps should be taken now to deal with the problem.

"For a start, SMEs should start to invest in the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of their employees," he said.

As employers, he said, communicating with employees could help businesses find the best way to deal with the productivity issue caused by Long Covid.

"We must understand the concerns that our employees have and the challenges they face so we can provide the necessary support for those who are struggling with Long Covid," he added.

Ng said employers could consider implementing flexible work arrangements for roles that did not require physical presence at the workplace.

“However, it takes two to make this work. If employers allow flexible work arrangements, employees must also agree to deliver on agreed performance standards,” he said.

From a healthcare standpoint, Murugan said, some patients might need regular consultations to manage the symptoms of Long Covid to help them stay productive.

“Paying close attention to one’s health is essential,” he pointed out.

He said that in some cases, the sufferer might have to see a therapist. “The best approach would be to seek medical help if symptoms persist four weeks after the infection,” he added.