

## **Costa Rica: Government relies on administrative and personal actions to combat COVID-19**

Costa Rica, like many other countries around the globe, has experienced the effects of the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, a respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus that first originated in Wuhan, China.

### **Labor related issues**

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Government issued a directive to encourage telecommuting in the public sector. According to the document, the head of each institution is to arrange all necessary actions for the involvement of as many workers as possible in said scheme. Moreover, the directive urges the private sector to promote similar measures<sup>1</sup>. However, up to this point in time, the private sector has not issued any specific request to alter the ordinary labor hours or to enforce telecommuting.

Moreover, several recommendations have been extended to the companies by the Ministry of Health<sup>2</sup>, e.g., paying close attention to symptoms presented by their employees, providing their workers with prevention equipment, such as gloves and face masks; as well as enabling their staff quick access to health services. Also, companies should file a report to their closest Health Administration Area if their personnel show respiratory symptoms and should not keep sick personnel in their premises.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/salud/coronavirus-covid-19-en-costa-rica-gobierno-pide/LKV2AHV7J5DF7OIIIVI7PWTAAA/story/>

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre\\_ministerio/prensa/docs/lineamientos\\_centros\\_trabajo\\_revision\\_05032020.pdf](https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre_ministerio/prensa/docs/lineamientos_centros_trabajo_revision_05032020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

# Arias

## Sanitary Authorities

Further, the Ministry of Health and our Social Security Administration have strengthened their efforts towards having a prepared response to such an event.

The Ministry of Health has issued guidelines for the monitoring of the illness<sup>4</sup> - updated on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020-, and established a contingency plan for the case of public health risks at the Juan Santamaria International Airport<sup>5</sup>, our main international airport.

Social Security Administration announced that it has already purchased the necessary laboratory equipment to confirm or rule out possible cases of COVID-19 infection, i.e. the equipment that allows for the carrying out of the PCR-TR test, under the Berlin Protocol<sup>6</sup> and has intensified the purchase of face masks, robes, antiseptic alcohol and protection lenses. In fact, some media started reporting shortage of these products in the market.<sup>7</sup> In general, the Social Security Administration has a total budget of about \$80M to face a possible emergency in the country.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the Government has ordered to cancel many crowd-drawing shows, such as concerts, parades, local fairs, etc.<sup>9</sup>. For example, the ICC event on International Arbitration, that takes place every year in Costa Rica and brings together lawyers from across the region, was canceled.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/index.php/centro-de-prensa/noticias/741-noticias-2020/1532-lineamientos-nacionales-para-la-vigilancia-de-la-infeccion-por-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre\\_ministerio/prensa/docs/plan\\_contingencia\\_eventos\\_salud\\_publica\\_AIJS.pdf](https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre_ministerio/prensa/docs/plan_contingencia_eventos_salud_publica_AIJS.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://delfino.cr/2020/02/autoridades-del-pais-aseguran-que-costa-rica-esta-preparado-para-enfrentar-la-llegada-del-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/salud/alta-demanda-global-de-insumos-por-nuevo/327UWUAPGRFDLBWZXOOZL6AGOA/story/>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.monumental.co.cr/2020/03/06/ccss-ya-invirtio-%E2%82%A167-millones-en-compra-de-mascarillas-batas-y-lentes-para-atender-eventuales-casos-de-covid-19/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/salud/coronavirus-covid-19-en-costa-rica-gobierno-pide/LKV2AHV7J5DF7OIIVVI7PWTAAA/story/>

# Arias

On the other hand, government officials have repeatedly insisted on personal and corporate responsibility as a key element in preventing transmission of said virus. In that regard, the use of personal antiseptic alcohol solutions has been heavily stressed by the Government as a preventive measure.

## **National Liquor Factory**

Thus, the National Liquor Factory has decided to triple the production of antiseptic alcohol, which implies a considerable increase in the purchase of the necessary raw materials, both for the making of the solution and for its packaging and distribution.

Given that the Factory reports weekly sales for around 10.000 units to the Costa Rican entity in charge of Social Security, it can be stated that the increase in production will have a considerable impact on the Factory's sales. Moreover, according to the Factory's highest officer, an open market plan has been presented, for said product to begin commercialization to the general public by the beginning of March, with a possible market price of the 350ml bottle at around USD\$3.50.

## **Customs and Immigration**

On the one hand, the Government has undertaken administrative actions, such as reinforcing airport controls and protocols, especially with travelers who have recently visited China, South Korea, Iran and Italy. Up until this point in time, Customs authorities have not issued any ban on travelers arriving from any countries. However, if they present COVID-19 symptoms, travelers are first sent to a specific area of the airport designated for these cases. Then, travelers are medically evaluated and, if necessary, sent to a health center for checking and observation<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, the Government has also been working with the Costa Rican Tourism Institute to disseminate relevant information to all those involved in the

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre\\_ministerio/prensa/docs/plan\\_contingencia\\_eventos\\_salud\\_publica\\_AIJS.pdf](https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre_ministerio/prensa/docs/plan_contingencia_eventos_salud_publica_AIJS.pdf)

# Arias

tourism industry. A specific set of guidelines has been issued for this sector as well<sup>11</sup>; among some of the most important measures for the companies to take is the responsibility to file a report to the closest Health Administration Area if tourists present COVID-19 symptoms and have visited risk areas. Companies should also guarantee the dissemination of information to their personnel and the tourists, and inform the latter about the need to visit our Ministry of Health's website for information on traveling, arrival and immigration. In the applicable cases, companies should also identify the most adequate rooms to perform a "domiciliary isolation" while they are relocated to the nearest health center.

"This article is intended to be a general summary of the law and does not constitute legal advice. You should consult with counsel to determine applicable legal requirements in a specific situation."

<sup>11</sup>[https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre\\_ministerio/prensa/docs/version\\_1\\_linea\\_gener\\_propiet\\_administr\\_servicios\\_turisticos.pdf](https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/sobre_ministerio/prensa/docs/version_1_linea_gener_propiet_administr_servicios_turisticos.pdf)