The impacts of the policies implementation to handle the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of employment

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Abstract. The implementation of policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic that has been taking place in Indonesia since the beginning of 2020 has resulted in various impacts, especially in the field of employment. This paper aims to analyze the positive and negative impacts of implementing those policies. This study uses a qualitative method, where data collection was conducted through interviews. The implementation of pandemic-related policies in PT Freeport Indonesia was selected as a case study. The findings of this study indicate that related to employment issues, the positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy were felt to be most significant on the issues of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and income. As for social protection (insurance), employment contracts, and severance pay, the impact was relatively not felt by workers.

1 Introduction

Since its first appearance in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, at the end of 2019, to date Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by SARS-CoV-2 has infected 142,017,767 people worldwide, of which 120,554,767 (98%) of them have been declared cured, while 3,033,003 (2%) have died (Worldometers.info, 2021). In Indonesia, the first positive case of COVID-19 was detected on March 2, 2020, namely two cases in Depok City, West Java Province. To date, the number of positive confirmed cases throughout Indonesia has reached 1,604,348 cases, of which 1,455,065 (90.7%) have been declared cured and 43,424 (2.7%) have died. Thus, there were 105,859 (6.6%) active cases (COVID19.go.id, 2021). During a period of approximately eleven months, the absence of a vaccine made social distancing the main strategy, if not the only strategy, to deal with the threat of transmission and spread of the coronavirus. It was only at the end of 2020 that various researches to find vaccines in various countries, including Indonesia, came to fruition. Finally, since early 2021 vaccination has become the main strategy in almost all countries in the world, in addition to social restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation certainly has an impact on almost all areas of life, including health, social, culture, economy, education, and other fields, although the two most frequently highlighted are the health and socio-economic aspects. The employment sector was one of the social institutions that cannot be separated from the influence of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on employment institutions was very significant. The results of the KSBSI research in May 2020 showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had an indirect impact on workers by the implementation of the rules set by the government on the business fields where the workers devoted themselves. The results show that there were workers who continue to work with full wages, continue to work but not full wages, were laid off with full wages, sent home with not full wages, layoffs with severance pay, layoffs without severance pay, work from home with full wages, work from home with not full wages. This condition resulted in the emergence of social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems for workers (KSBSI, 2020).

In reality, the pandemic situation was a complicated situation that must be addressed and overcome with complex steps as well. Policies and countermeasures that were taken and implemented, cannot be denied, also resulted in impacts that must be considered. The problem examined in this study was the impact of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy itself. The impacts in question were more about the impact on labor conditions, especially in the mining sector.

2 Method

This study uses a qualitative approach. PT Freeport Indonesia (PTFI), which operates in Mimika Regency, Papua Province, is used as a case study in this study. However, because in carrying out its operations PTFI is
supported by subcontracting and privatization companies in its supply chain (SC) network, some of the informants in this study also came from these subcontracting companies. According to PTFI's 2018 list of privatizations and contractors, there are a total of 351 organizations in the SC network, with the total number of human resources involved reaching 14,777 people.

The research was carried out for approximately three months, namely between January and March 2021. The informants of this research consisted of workers/laborers, trade union officials/laborers, and company management, both of whom have authority as policymakers and are tasked with implementing policies on handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the work environment. During the research period, the Research Team conducted interviews with 49 informants, consisting of 11 informants from the management of PT Freeport Indonesia, 19 people from the management of trade unions/labor, and 19 informants from the workers/laborers.

Informants were selected based on several considerations. For the category of company management, the main consideration is the involvement of informants in the implementation of policies for handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the work environment, both as policymakers and policy implementers. Informants in this category have various positions, ranging from the superintendent, manager, to vice president. For the category of workers/labor union administrators, the main consideration in selecting informants is their involvement in the implementation of policies for handling the COVID-19 pandemic in their capacity as workers/labor union administrators. For the category of workers/labor, informants were selected to represent different work units. This is based on the consideration that different work units have different operational characteristics, so they must implement measures to handle the COVID-19 pandemic under their activities. In addition, the informants did not only come from PTFI, but also several other companies within PTFI's operational network, such as PTPJP, PTKPI, and PTPU.

The research was conducted in the context of PTFI's production activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the COVID-19 pandemic situation did not allow field research to be carried out in Mimika Regency, where PT Freeport Indonesia operates. Therefore, almost all data collection activities are carried out by relying on the intermediary of technology.

First, data collection through structured interviews. In this activity, the Research Team has prepared a list of questions submitted to the informants through the Google Form application. The list of questions includes personal information from informants, as well as closed and open questions regarding the impact of implementing policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for workers.

Second, collecting data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. In this activity, the Research Team conducted interviews in two ways, namely face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. Direct, face-to-face interviews were conducted with informants from the management of the company who were in Jakarta during the research period. Given the pandemic situation that requires social distancing. Meanwhile, telephone interviews were conducted with informants from the management of the trade/labor union who were in the Mimika Regency during the research period.

Third, primary data collection is in the form of documents, including policy documents such as Government Regulations, Minister of Health Regulations, Circulars, as well as in PTFI's internal context, the Interoffice-Memorandum (IOM). Finally, secondary data collection through literature study.

3 Result and Analysis

3.1 An Update on the Situation of COVID-19 Pandemic and the Impacts of Policies Implementation to Handle It

In Mimika Regency, the first positive case of COVID-19 was detected on March 29, 2020. The latest data as of February 22, 2021, shows that the total number of positive cases in the district reached 4,606 cases, of which 4,162 (90.4%) were declared cured and 40 (0.9%) died (COVID19.MimikaKab.go.id, 2021).

During a period of approximately eleven months, social restrictions, the implementation of health protocols, and the application of a Clean and Healthy Lifestyle (PHBS) became the main strategy, it could even be said to be the only strategy, to deal with the threat of transmission and spread of the coronavirus. This is because as a new disease, there is no vaccine for COVID-19. It was only at the end of 2020 that various studies to find the vaccine in several countries, including Indonesia, showed encouraging results. Furthermore, in January 2021 the COVID-19 vaccination in Indonesia can begin.

To achieve herd immunity to stop the transmission and spread of the coronavirus, at least 70% (182 million people) of the Indonesian population must receive vaccinations. For this reason, the government plans a vaccination program in stages, in which the first phase is prioritized for 1.6 million health workers throughout Indonesia, and is targeted for completion in February 2021. The next phase will be for 17.4 million public service personnel and 21.5 million elderly people (Kompas.com, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the socio-economic sector. During 2020 the world economy experienced a sluggish, with slowing economic growth. Even in several countries, including Indonesia, the government officially announced a recession. However, this impact does not come from the COVID-19 disease itself. This impact is precisely the price that must be paid from the implementation of policies to handle the pandemic that relies on social restrictions.

Various economic activities that rely on the gathering of many people are the worst affected sectors, such as entertainment and tourism venues, and shopping centers. In addition, various manufacturing activities that use a large number of workers to carry out their production
activities (labor-intensive) are also experiencing serious impacts. Social restrictions forced factories to utilize only a small part of the number of resources and labor they had so that the utilization of production capacity experienced a significant reduction, and productivity fell drastically. In contrast to office workers who can still carry out their work from home (work from home), more workers in these sectors are then laid off, even experiencing layoffs (PHK).

The next economic sector that is also significantly affected by the social restriction policy is the service sector in the transportation sector. With the appeal not to travel—even in some countries, travel bans—most people no longer travel, either for sightseeing and recreation, visiting friends and relatives, or for official purposes. The number of people traveling, whether by land, sea, or air, has thus fallen sharply.

Many experts from various countries have highlighted economic conditions that have experienced a slowdown, stagnation, and even negative growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not a few of these experts have underlined various arguments why the current economic recession is more serious than the previous economic recessions, such as in 2008, there are even those who argue that the situation is worse than the Great Depression in the 1930s. One of the things that distinguish this recession from previous ones, is the fact that it was caused by a deliberate, even programmed, cause, namely social distancing to slow the spread of the pandemic. Economic activity seems to have been stopped on purpose.

At the same time, supporting the existing health system to survive is a very expensive undertaking. Most of the resources owned by the state are unavoidably reallocated to the health sector, both to support the treatment of the sick, especially COVID-19 patients, as well as to conduct research to produce vaccines that can be used to fight the rampant epidemic.

However, this does not mean that all sectors of the economy are paralyzed. Even certain sectors are experiencing growth during the emergency of the pandemic. The digital economy is one sector that is gaining momentum for rapid growth. A drastic reduction in people's travel means an increase in the need for online buying and selling and thus an increase in the delivery of goods. Furthermore, teaching and learning activities in the education sector, ranging from the level of playgroups and kindergartens, primary and secondary education, to higher education at various institutes, colleges, and universities, must be carried out online. This is an opportunity for the emergence and development of various digital companies, including start-up companies, which provide applications to facilitate distance learning. Likewise with the implementation of the work from the home system; the need for technological facilitation is also increasing, both for coordination purposes such as short message services (Whatsapp, Telegram, etc.) and video conferencing (Zoom, Webex, Google Meet, Microsoft Team, etc.), as well as sending documents (electronic mail/ e-mail).

3.2 Evaluation on the Impacts of the Policies Implementation to Handle the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this subsection, we will discuss the impact of implementing policies for handling the COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of workers/laborers and, in particular, trade/labor unions. The discussion will be divided into several subtopics. First, the perception of workers/labor and trade/labor unions on the significance of implementing policies on their lives in general. In this case, they will also discuss what areas of life they think are most affected by the implementation of the existing policies. Second, subtopics on the positive and negative impacts of policy implementation on various employment issues, including Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), income, social protection (insurance), employment contracts, and severance pay.

3.2.1 The Perception of Labor Union on the Significance of the Implementation of Policies to Handle COVID-19 Pandemic

Rationally, the implementation of policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the form of implementing health protocols and social restrictions to keep the company's activities operating, of course, I have an impact on the lives of workers/laborers. However, to confirm this assumption, we feel it is necessary to categorize the perceptions of informants among those who believe the implementation of the policy has a significant effect on the lives of those who believe otherwise. As a result, the majority of informants (86%) are of the view that the implementation of the policy significantly affects the lives of workers/laborers. The results of the quantification of the informants' perceptions can be seen in Fig. 1:

![Fig. 1. The informants' perception concerning the significance of the implementation of policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.](image-url)

Based on the results of the interviews, we also identified areas of life that were felt to be most affected by the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy. These fields include economics, health, social, lifestyle, food, quality of life, family, and production. Of all these areas of life, economic, health, and social are the three areas that are felt to be most affected by the implementation of existing policies.
In detail, the informants' perceptions of the areas affected by the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic handling policy can be seen in Fig. 2:

![Fig. 2. The areas of life that were significantly influenced by the implementation of the policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.](image_url)

In Fig. 2, we present a diagram that compares the perceptions of trade unions/labor and employees in viewing the areas most affected by the implementation of policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these two categories of informants have similar perceptions, that the impact of policy implementation is greatest in the economic, health, and social fields.

In the economic field, based on policies issued by the government (in this case the Ministry of Manpower) and companies, there are no salary cuts—employees still receive the full amount of salary. However, the rearrangement of work mechanisms and patterns still affects the income received by employees. This is due to the reduced number of benefits and bonuses given to employees. Regarding economic conditions, at the household level of workers/laborers, a positive impact is felt in the form of a frugal lifestyle driven by prohibitions or restrictions on activities outside the home and in crowded places. However, in a broader context, this causes economic activity to experience sluggishness because most people do not consume through shopping, recreation, tourism, and the like.

In the health sector, of course, the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy has an impact on the lives of employees. With this policy, particularly related to social restrictions and health protocols, employees can be sufficiently protected from the transmission of COVID-19. In this case, existing policies tend to have a positive impact. However, social restrictions to prevent transmission also have undesirable effects related to the psychological health of employees. The results of interviews with several informants showed that reduced contact and time to gather with family had implications for increasing employee stress levels.

In the social sector, the impact of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy can be seen in several ways. Social restrictions cause interaction and socialization among employees to decrease, especially because they cannot gather to do activities that are usually done in a social or friendship environment. Reduction of employee travel from the Highlands (Tembagapura) to the Lowlands (Timika City) and vice versa also affects the decrease in the quantity and quality of time spent by employees with their families. This creates a psychological burden for them. Some of the informants also complained about the boredom that is generally felt by employees because of the necessity to do an antigen swab test every time they want to leave and enter Tembagapura. Nevertheless, they are still aware and understand the importance of the test both to monitor their health condition, protect the health of their families, and prevent uncontrolled local transmission in the work area. In other words, the willingness to always carry out an antigen swab test every time they want to enter and exit Tembagapura is a 'form of sacrifice' that they must do.

3.2.2 The positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic

Based on interviews with informants, we tried to identify the positive and negative impacts of implementing policies to handle COVID-19 on various employment issues, including Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), income, social protection (insurance), employment contracts, and severance pay. The following is an explanation of each of these issues.

a. Occupational Health and Safety

Based on interviews with informants, we identified several positive impacts of implementing the COVID-19 handling policy on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). These positive impacts include (1) educating workers/laborers so that their awareness of OHS increases, (2) workers/laborers are protected from the threat of coronavirus transmission, (3) reduced concerns of workers/laborers to go to the work area because generally everyone is aware of the health protocols that must be adhered to, as well as (4) increasing cleanliness in the work environment.

In addition to the positive impacts above, we also identified some negative impacts expressed by the informants. These negative impacts include (1) increased awareness and mutual suspicion among workers/laborers because everyone can be a carrier and transmit the coronavirus, (2) the necessity to work individually and not be able to work in groups can lead to reduced effectiveness and performance, (3) there is a lot of fatigue (fatigue) in the workplace, both physically and psychologically, due to a reduction in crew/personnel working at the same time, (4) delays in certain jobs because they must always carry out health protocols, and (5) the decline in the achievement of OHS performance targets that have been set by the company.

In one interview with an informant, it was also found that there is a link between OHS both with the productivity of the company and the income earned by the worker/laborer. He explained that the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy could help fulfill the availability of human resources (manpower) needed. With
a large number of employees who are healthy and safe, it will be more guaranteed to fulfill the number of human resources who work under the needs of the job. The availability of human resources is very necessary for all operational activities of the company to keep it running smoothly and achieve monthly and annual production targets. For workers/laborers themselves, good OHS quality will directly affect the amount of income received, especially from production bonuses, because OHS performance is one of the important indicators or requirements in calculating bonuses given by the company. Thus, in a broader context, the implementation of policies for handling COVID-19 to ensure the quality of OHS also contributes to building mutually beneficial industrial relations during the pandemic.

There are also problems in implementing policies related to OSH, such as technical constraints, especially the lack of masks so that some workers/laborers wear masks that do not meet the standards, work safety violations, and negligence in using masks due to lack of information and awareness, there are still employees who lack concerned with health protocols, there are still employees who lack discipline in the work environment (such as smoking in the workspace), decreased focus and concentration of workers/laborers due to anxiety. On the other hand, some factors make it easier to implement policies for handling COVID-19, one of which is the habit of workers/laborers who have been sufficiently developed in complying with OHS rules.

To optimize the implementation of policies, the company's management always cooperates with trade unions to carry out communication and coordination (social dialogue), as well as monitoring and evaluation (money) regularly to minimize the negative impact of implementing policies on handling COVID-19, both on the condition of workers/laborers, and their families, as well as the company's operational and production activities.

b. Income

The results of interviews with informants also helped us in identifying some of the positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy on the income of workers/laborers. The positive impacts that have been identified include (1) the maintenance of income for workers/laborers due to the provision of incentives, especially for those who work in the Highlands, and (2) the emergence of an increasingly frugal lifestyle due to the prohibition/restrictions on carrying out activities outside the home and in public places.

The negative impacts that have been identified include (1) reduced employee rights, especially in the form of bonuses, so that their income is reduced, (2) there is discrimination in the provision of incentives, and (3) reduced benefits received by employees if they are confirmed positive for COVID-19 or quarantined.

The results of interviews with some informants indicate that the impact of implementing the COVID-19 handling policy on employee income, whether it will be positive or negative, is largely determined by the employee's health condition. If the employee is in good health, the income tends to remain good; but if they are sick, their income will decrease. This is because salary payments and various forms of benefits are still calculated based on employee productivity. As a result, employees who are sick or exposed to COVID-19, experience a decrease in income because they have to undergo quarantine/isolation and cannot work. Employees often complain about this. According to the trade/labor union, the circular letter from the Minister of Manpower stipulates that employees who cannot work because they have to undergo quarantine/isolation should still receive their full salary. However, in reality, this policy has not been fully implemented by the company for reasons of performance and productivity.

If we look closely, the problems above are not naturally rooted in the implementation of policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather on the provisions that have been imposed by the company in normal times. In this case, one form of bonus received by employees is a safety bonus (a bonus based on performance in carrying out OHS)—if the employee's safety performance is good, the bonus he receives is good, and vice versa. Therefore, an informant explained, when a work accident occurs in a certain division, for example, the relevant division will experience a reduction in the safety bonus, and thus, the employees' annual production bonus will also be affected. Based on this way of thinking, employees who are infected with COVID-19 are considered to have decreased OHS performance so that they experience a reduction in bonuses, especially if this happens due to negligence in carrying out health protocols.

Considering the above conditions, where employee complaints arise regarding declining income on the one hand, and on the other hand, the calculation of bonuses by the company which is still based on the provisions of OHS performance in normal situations, it is necessary to have a dialogue between employees represented by trade unions, with the company to achieve a common perception.

Regarding the impact of implementing this policy on income, there is one interesting finding that needs to be highlighted in particular. In the interviews we conducted with informants from the workers/labor and trade unions, we found that some of the informants stated that the positive impact was more pronounced because there were additional incentives and bonuses provided by the company. However, at the same time, some informants stated the opposite, that their income was decreasing. At first glance, there are contradictions in the answers and descriptions among the informants. To get a better understanding of this 'contradiction', we tried to map the statements of the informants.

The decrease in income, based on the results of the interview, was caused mainly by the absence of the bonuses they would normally get under normal circumstances. In addition, a more crucial reason is that some employees cannot work because they have to undergo quarantine/isolation, either because they have been diagnosed positive for COVID-19, become a suspect, or because they have physical contact with a positive COVID-19 patient. As for those who state that
incentives exist, these incentives are generally 'conditional'; incentives are given only to employees who can continue to work productively, as well as to those who work in certain areas, for example in the Highlands. Thus, in this case, COVID-19 does not directly affect the income of workers/laborers; however, its spread does drastically increase the risk of workers/laborers getting sick and losing some of the incentives or bonuses that they should have been able to get.

The above situation then creates a new problem in the form of social jealousy among fellow workers/laborers. There is a perception among some workers/laborers that discrimination has occurred because of the unequal distribution of incentives. This is also exacerbated by the emergence of the perception that there is no clarity in determining employee criteria, which are important (and still employed normally) and which are less important (thus working from home or even being laid off). A similar perception was expressed by other informants who viewed unjust discrimination in the application of work presence rules.

In a pandemic, several external factors affect the family's economic condition. Government policies such as cutting/discounting PLN electricity payments for 900 W power consumers that have been running for one year, for example, ease the burden felt by worker/labor households. However, several other external factors added to the burden they felt, such as rising prices for various basic needs and transportation costs.

c. Social Protection (Insurance)

In general, based on the results of interviews with informants, the policy for handling the COVID-19 pandemic and its implementation has not had any impact on the social protection/insurance program participated by the workers/laborers. However, several things are of concern to workers/laborers and trade unions/laborers.

First, if the worker/laborer remains healthy and continues to work, his saving plan can continue to run so that its value increases; subsidies from the government are very helpful in this regard. On the other hand, if the worker/laborer is exposed to COVID-19 and cannot work for days during the quarantine/isolation period, then the saving plan may also be disrupted. In other words, social protection which should eliminate or at least reduce the concerns of workers/laborers during the pandemic, especially when exposed to the coronavirus and have to undergo quarantine or treatment, actually becomes a source of anxiety because of the possibility that workers/laborers cannot maintain the value of their savings. their plan is due to illness.

Lack of socialization regarding insurance is also a problem because it causes many employees who do not know well the ins and outs of the insurance they follow. In such a situation, some workers/laborers are compelled to perceive injustice in terms of insurance, so that in general the quality of the implementation of the insurance program is considered poor.

d. Employment Contract

In general, the COVID-19 handling policy does not directly affect the work contract, because there are no changes to the work contract or the articles in the Collective Labor Agreement (PKB) due to the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy. However, during the pandemic, the company did not hold any new employee recruitment activities. On the one hand, from the employee's point of view, this can be seen as a positive impact because it means that their employment contract will be able to be extended; but on the other hand, from the point of view of people who hope to work at PTFI, this can also be seen as a negative impact because there is very little chance of applying for a job.

So far, PTFI itself has not experienced layoffs due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several informants revealed that many employees were laid off, even laid off, in several subcontractor companies that were included in the PTFI supply chain (SC). Some subcontracting companies also did not renew the contracts of some of their workers/laborers because these workers/laborers were not considered an 'essential' unit during the pandemic. In a situation like this, it is not surprising that there is widespread concern among workers/laborers, both at PTFI itself and in its various subcontracting companies, that they may be laid off or even laid off.

e. Severance Pay

In general, there is also no impact whatsoever due to the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic handling policy on severance pay. This is because PTFI so far has not taken a policy to lay off its employees.

However, some informants revealed that the amount of severance pay has decreased, so it is considered unfair for dismissed employees. However, there is no definite information on whether this happened to some of PTFI's employees, or to employees who work in subcontracting companies within the PTFI supply chain network. If it is true that PTFI did not lay off employees during the pandemic, then it is very likely that what the informants said happened to PTFI's subcontracting companies.

4 Conclusion

Based on the discussion that has been carried out in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the impact of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy is considered to be the most significant in the economic, health, and social fields. In the economic field, changes in work patterns affect the income received by employees. Some employees feel an increase in income from incentives provided by the company related to COVID-19, but others feel a decrease. In the health sector, social restrictions and health protocols have proven to be effective in keeping employees from transmitting the coronavirus. However, unwanted effects appear in the form of stress and work fatigue. In the social sector, social restrictions and travel restrictions cause a decrease in the intensity and frequency of interaction and socialization among employees, as well as the quantity and quality of time with family. This creates a psychological burden for employees.
Regarding employment issues, the positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the COVID-19 handling policy are felt most significantly on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and income issues. As for social protection (insurance), employment contracts, and severance pay, the impact is relatively insignificant. Regarding OHS, the positive impacts of policies for handling the pandemic include (i) more educating workers/laborers about OHS, (ii) safeguarding workers/laborers from the threat of coronavirus transmission, (iii) reducing concerns of workers/laborers to go to work areas, and (iv) increasing cleanliness in the work environment. The negative impacts include (i) increased awareness and mutual suspicion among workers/laborers, (ii) unable to work in groups, (iii) there is a lot of fatigue in the workplace, both physically and psychologically, because of reduction of crew/personnel, (iv) delays in certain jobs because they must always implement health protocols and (v) decrease in the achievement of OHS performance targets that have been set by the company. Regarding income, the positive impacts of the pandemic handling policy include (i) providing incentives, and (ii) increasing frugal lifestyles. The negative impact includes (i) reduced employee rights in the form of bonuses, (ii) discrimination in the provision of incentives, and (3) reduced benefits if employees are quarantined.

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