

Work health and safety during COVID-19: Guide to keeping your workplace safe, clean and healthy

Overview of requirements: Your duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* to respond to COVID-19.

Workers

You must take reasonable care for your own health and safety and the health and safety of others in your workplace. You must co-operate with any reasonable policy or procedure that relates to health or safety at the workplace.

Employers

You must take action to protect workers and others at the workplace from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes implementing the public health measures issued by health authorities including Queensland Health and the Australian Government Department of Health. It is vital that you consult with and communicate with workers and their health and safety representatives (HSRs) on workplace measures to address COVID-19.

Put in place a plan to respond to COVID-19 and to any directives issued by Queensland Health—this should include infection prevention and control policies and procedures, safe systems of work, how workers and their HSRs will be consulted, and how you will monitor and update your plan as public health information changes. Consult with workers on the plan and display it clearly in the workplace. Consultation with workers, and, where applicable their representative, is required at each step of the risk management process.

Implement measures to keep workers safe and stop the spread of COVID-19:

- Work from home where possible.
- Implement and promote high order controls to complement hygiene practices (e.g. social distancing such as work from home where possible, create separate walkways through worksites, limit numbers of people in lunch or crib rooms or install barriers and screens).
- Equally as important, implement good hygiene practices including hand hygiene and workplace cleaning – employers must provide sufficient cleaning and disinfection supplies and equipment, or engage a suitable cleaning service.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) where necessary and in accordance with the relevant State and National guidelines.
- Consider industry specific advice for higher risk workplaces or industries where the health of workers or people who are at the workplace are at higher risk (e.g. residential aged care, healthcare and correctional facilities).
- Manage psycho-social risks for workers.
- Communicate, train and supervise workers on workplace measures to address COVID-19.

Report and notify cases of COVID-19—if there is a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 infection at your workplace, Queensland Health will be notified by the medical professional who confirms the diagnosis and the relevant testing laboratory.

To avoid duplication of reporting, for the time being employers do not need to notify Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) if an employee is a confirmed or probable case. WHSQ will respond to all requests for advice or assistance on COVID-19 related matters. Our inspectors will continue to ensure businesses are complying with requirements to prevent exposure to unacceptable health and safety risks.

Work health and safety during COVID-19

Guide to keeping your workplace safe, clean and healthy

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an exceptional set of circumstances and many workers, worker representatives and employers have concerns about working safely, especially for those who are required to continue working on site, outside of the home. These concerns include the actions that should be taken to ensure workplace hygiene and cleanliness is achieved to the standard necessary to prevent the spread of infection.

To address these concerns, this document has been developed by the Office of Industrial Relations (OIR) to support guidance provided by Queensland Health to the Queensland community, including guidance to Queensland employers and workers, as to measures to be undertaken in the workplace to protect people against COVID-19 infection.

Duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Queensland)*

Employers

It is your duty as an employer to provide your employees with a safe and healthy work environment. Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act), you must assess risks and implement and review control measures to prevent or minimise exposure to these risks.

To properly manage exposure to risks related to COVID-19, employers must:

- identify workplace hazards (such as potential for transmission on the worksite or hazards resulting from a worker who tests positive for COVID-19 infection)
- determine who might be harmed, and how (including workers and any other individuals in the workplace)
- decide on control measures (including ways to prevent the spread of infection)
- put controls in place
- review the controls regularly.

Employers must consult with workers. Consultation involves sharing of information, including about possible sources of exposure to COVID-19 and associated health risks, giving workers a reasonable opportunity to express views and taking those views into account before making decisions on health and safety matters. A safe workplace is achieved when everyone involved in the work communicates with each other to identify hazards and risks, talks about health and safety concerns and works together to find solutions.

Workers must be consulted on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace, including (but not limited to):

- identifying the tasks and processes that could result in the spread of COVID-19
- developing a plan in response to COVID-19
- making changes to processes or procedures could result in the spread of COVID-19
- making changes to controls to protect workers from the spread of COVID-19
- providing information and training for workers.

The information outlined below in this guide will assist employers to follow the steps employers must take in response to COVID-19.

Workers

Workers also have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the health and safety of others in the workplace. Workers must co-operate with any reasonable policy or procedure that relates to health or safety at the workplace, including in relation to COVID-19.

The actions taken by both employers and workers to discharge their duties under the WHS Act are an important part of the community response to COVID-19. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) within OIR is working on an ongoing basis to ensure businesses are complying with their duties to prevent exposure to unacceptable health and safety risks.

Employers' role to keep workplace safe, clean and healthy

1. Put in place a plan to respond to the pandemic and public health directions

Stay informed about the pandemic and put a plan in place to respond to the issues created by the pandemic. A plan should include:

- reviewing infection prevention and control policies and procedures which include actively promoting social distancing, good hand and respiratory hygiene, and increased cleaning of common areas, frequently touched surfaces and shared workstations within the work environment
- implementing a safe system of work consistent with directions and advice provided by health authorities
- how workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs) will be consulted
- monitoring of the COVID-19 situation as it develops, relying on information from authoritative sources such as health authorities.

2. Implement measures to keep workers safe and stop the spread of COVID-19

- People who are sick or who have been directed by health authorities to either self-isolate or self-quarantine must not attend work and must stay at home and away from others.
- Follow the advice from health authorities on social distancing and public gatherings.

Working from home

Workers should work from home unless work can only be performed at the workplace (e.g. construction, manufacturing and health care industries).

Detailed information regarding work health and safety arrangements for employees working at home has been published online by [Workplace Health and Safety Queensland](#) and [Safe Work Australia](#).

When implementing work from home arrangements, employers should:

- provide workers with the equipment, resources and support they will need to carry out work remotely
- give workers guidance on how to set up a safe home office environment to ensure they comply with good ergonomic practices
- maintain daily communication with workers
- provide workers with continued access to employee assistance programs
- recognise each worker's personal circumstances are different and that this may affect a person's work capacity and capability
- consider the psychosocial risks of isolation, high or low job demands, reduced social support from managers and colleagues, fatigue, online bullying, and domestic and family violence, and do what is reasonably practicable to manage these risks.

Measures at the workplace

Where workers and others must attend the workplace, a range of measures should be put in place to minimise the risks posed by COVID-19 to workers and others.

Detailed information regarding COVID-19 workplace risk management has been published online by [Workplace Health and Safety Queensland](#) and [Safe Work Australia](#).

Risk management measures for the workplace include (but are not limited to) the following:

Social distancing

Social distancing includes ways to stop or slow down the spread of infection by ensuring less contact between people. These strategies will also help minimise the number of workers who might be categorised as close contacts should a person at work test positive for COVID-19 infection.

- implement [social distancing](#) by keeping a distance of at least 1.5 metres between people to the extent possible, for example move work stations, desks and tables further apart
- limit the number of people in an enclosed area to one person per 4 metre square (for example, in vehicles or in lunch or crib rooms)

| Example: Building or construction site | |
|--|--|
| Create specific walkways for different workers through the construction site to maintain physical separation. | Stagger meal times and smokos to limit the number of workers congregating in one area. Spread out furniture in crib/break rooms at least 1.5 metres apart. |
| Conduct toolbox and other meetings online, including through an app, where possible. If not possible, conduct such meetings in wide open spaces to enable workers to keep the required physical distance of at least 1.5 metres. | Consider what work can be carried out off-site such as prefabrication work, or administrative work from home. |

- don't shake hands to greet people
- separate workers from customers and/or other workers using barriers, screens or social distancing markers on the floor
- restrict visitors to the workplace (e.g. use a screening questionnaire to identify high risk individuals such as those who are sick or in isolation)
- cancel non-essential meetings or hold meetings via video conferencing or phone call
- encourage customers to use tap and go, direct deposit or other contactless payment option instead of cash
- limit the number of people in vehicles
- re-organise work schedules and rosters to reduce the number of workers in an area or onsite
- reduce the sharing of equipment and tools (e.g. hot desking)
- consider alternative work arrangements where possible for workers considered at [increased risk](#) of complications of COVID-19.

| Example: Road freight and deliveries | |
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| Direct workers to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods such as mobile phones to communicate with customers and deliveries at their premises wherever possible. | Use electronic paperwork where possible. If a signature is required, talk to the business about providing a confirmation email instead, or take a photo of the goods onsite as proof of delivery. |
| Direct workers to use contactless payment for fuel or supplies. | Prohibit drivers from travelling with passengers. |

Infection may spread more rapidly at some types of workplaces if it is introduced. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and congregate settings such as residential aged care facilities and correctional centres. Non-essential visits to these types of workplaces should be restricted to protect the health of the people who live or work there.

Practice good personal and hand hygiene

Good personal and hand hygiene helps protect against infection and prevent the virus from spreading.

- Encourage all workers to practise [good hygiene by](#) frequently [cleaning their hands](#). [Hand washing should take](#) at least 20 to 30 seconds. Wash the whole of each hand (palms, fingers, nails and back of hands), covering all areas with soap before washing with water. If hand washing is not practical, alcohol-based hand sanitiser containing at least 60% ethanol or 70%

iso-propanol is recommended. Use the same process to rub your hands with sanitiser for 20 – 30 seconds. Alcohol free hand sanitisers are not recommended because they have not been shown to be effective against the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Provide hand washing facilities including clean running water, soap, paper towels or air dryer. If hand washing facilities are not readily available provide hand sanitiser.
- Consider placing hand sanitiser in locations such as lunchrooms, worker-customer interface areas and at office entrances/exits to encourage hand hygiene
- Keep hand hygiene facilities properly stocked and in good working order
- Promote good personal hygiene when sneezing and coughing. People should cover their coughs or sneezes with an elbow or tissue, dispose of the tissue immediately and wash their hands, and avoid touching their face.
- Ensure symptomatic people (staff, contactors, customers, etc.) do not come into the workplace.

Keep the workplace clean during COVID-19

- Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces
- This includes door handles, benchtops, kitchens, tabletops and desks, bathroom fixtures, toilets, water taps, lunchrooms, photocopiers, reception desks, sign-in stations and desktop equipment including keyboards and telephones

In addition to regular, routine cleaning of workplaces, such as emptying bins and cleaning toilets, enhanced cleaning may help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Keeping the workplace clean is important for reducing the number of germs that survive on surfaces.

Employers must provide sufficient cleaning and disinfection supplies and equipment, or engage a suitable cleaning service.

| Example: Office environment | |
|--|---|
| Provide detergent/disinfectant wipes to employees to clean workstations, and workstation equipment such as monitors, phones, keyboards and mice. | Provide supplies of alcohol-based hand sanitiser around the office space, where possible. |

Routine cleaning

Routine workplace cleaning should be undertaken at least daily and possibly more often in larger, busier workplaces. Carrying out a risk assessment will help determine how often cleaning should be done.

Cleaning should be carried out in all areas where work is undertaken so far as is reasonably practicable including fixed and mobile work areas such as offices, lunchrooms, mobile plant, motor vehicles. Where plant, equipment or tools are shared, for example hot desking or motor vehicles, touch surfaces should be cleaned between users.

| Example: Agriculture | |
|---|--|
| Provide workers with cleaning agents and training them to clean down plant or equipment (e.g. farm machinery or tools) immediately after use. | Workers should each be provided with their own equipment if possible and should be physically organised in a way that maintains social distance. |

Special attention should be given to surfaces that are frequently touched. This includes door handles, benchtops, kitchens, tabletops and desks, bathroom fixtures, toilets, water taps, lunchrooms, photocopiers, reception desks, sign-in stations and desktop equipment including keyboards and telephones.

Clean with detergent and water

Physically clean surfaces using detergent and water (use as per the label instructions), followed by rinsing and drying. A clean cloth (disposable or able to be laundered) should be used each time.

Start the cleaning process in the cleanest areas and finish in the dirtier areas (also see *Cleaning equipment* section) to prevent cross-infection. Wear either single-use or reusable gloves (such as washing-up gloves) when cleaning. If using reusable gloves wash them off using running water and detergent after use and hang outside to dry. Wash your hands after you have finished cleaning and removed the gloves.

Cleaning equipment

Cleaning equipment includes mops with detachable heads (so they can be washed in a washing machine using hot water), disposable cloths or cloths that can be laundered. Ensure that cleaning equipment is well maintained, cleaned and appropriately stored.

Different cloths should be used for cleaning different areas, e.g. kitchen, bathroom, toilet. It can be useful to have colour-coded cloths or sponges for each area (e.g. blue in the bathroom, yellow in the kitchen) so that it is easier to keep them separate.

Disposable cleaning cloths should be placed in the general waste after use.

Disinfectants

Cleaning with detergent and water should be adequate for routine cleaning. Disinfectants are usually only necessary if a surface has been contaminated with potentially infectious material.

If you do need to use a disinfectant, clean the surface first then use disinfectant or use a combined detergent and disinfectant. Disinfectants will not kill germs if the surface has not been cleaned first. Make sure the disinfectant has enough time in contact with the surface, is used at the right concentration and is applied to a clean, dry surface.

Cleaning and disinfection after suspected or confirmed COVID-19

Areas that have been used by a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection should be cleaned and disinfected.

Wear personal protective equipment

Put on personal protective equipment (PPE) before entering the area. This includes:

- disposable gloves
- disposable apron or other protective garment
- protective eyewear to protect your eyes from the cleaning chemicals
- If a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection remains in the area while the cleaning is done (e.g. hotel room), they should wear a surgical mask, if available, to cover their coughs and sneezes. The person who is cleaning the area should also wear a surgical mask to prevent them from touching their face. Once you enter the area, avoid touching your face and don't touch or adjust your face mask if one is worn. If wearing a mask, it should be either on or off – ensure it always covers both the nose and mouth and don't let it dangle from the neck.

Cleaning recommendations

Cleaning of hard surfaces (e.g. bench tops) should be done using either:

- a physical clean using a combined detergent and 1,000 ppm bleach solution (2-in-1 clean) made up daily from a concentrated solution. Follow manufacturer's directions for dilution.
- a physical clean using detergent and water followed by a clean with 1,000 ppm bleach solution (2-step clean), for example, household bleach or hospital-grade bleach solutions that are readily available from retail stores. Follow manufacturer's directions for use or see Table 1 below for a dilution recipe.

Bleach solutions should be made fresh daily and gloves should be worn when handling and preparing bleach solutions. Protective eyewear should be worn in case of splashing.

Cleaning equipment including mop heads and cloths should be laundered using hot water and completely dried before re-use. Cleaning equipment, such as buckets, should be emptied and cleaned with a new batch of chlorine bleach solution and allowed to dry completely before re-use.

Preparation of bleach solutions

Household bleach comes in a variety of strengths of the active ingredient (sodium hypochlorite) which is indicated on the product label often listed as available chlorine.

Table 1: Recipes to achieve a 1,000 ppm bleach solution

| Original strength of bleach (available chlorine) | Disinfectant recipe to make up 1 litre of bleach solution. In a bucket, place the volume of water required and gently add the measured volume of bleach. |
|--|--|
| % strength | Volume of bleach (ml) |
| 1 | 100 ml |
| 2 | 50 ml |
| 3 | 33 ml |
| 4 | 25 ml |
| 5 | 20 ml |

Note: Minimum standards that must be followed for the handling of hazardous chemicals are outlined in the [Managing risks of hazardous chemicals Code of Practice 2013](#).

Once cleaning is completed, place all disposable cleaning items in the general waste. Waste does not need any additional handling or treatment measures. Reusable cleaning items, such as mop heads, should be cleaned as per the cleaning recommendations below.

People should use the following process to safely remove personal protective equipment:

- Remove and dispose of gloves. The outside of gloves may be contaminated. Remove gloves being careful not to contaminate bare hands during glove removal.
- Clean your hands. This can be done with either soap and running water or hand sanitiser.
- Remove and dispose of the apron. The apron front may be contaminated. Untie or break fasteners and pull apron away from body, touching the inside of the apron only.
- Clean your hands. This can be done with either soap and running water or hand sanitiser.
- Remove protective eyewear/face shield. The outside of protective eyewear/face shield may be contaminated. Remove eyewear/face shield by tilting the head forward and lifting the head band or ear pieces. Avoid touching the front surface of the eyewear/face shield. Reusable protective eyewear should be washed in detergent and water and allowed to completely air dry.
- Clean your hands. This can be done with either soap and running water or hand sanitiser.
- Remove and dispose of the surgical mask if worn. Do not touch the front of the surgical mask. Remove the surgical mask by holding the elastic straps or ties and remove without touching the front.
- Clean your hands. This can be done with either soap and running water or hand sanitiser. PPE can be disposed into the general waste.

For more information refer to [Queensland Health](#).

Consider use of personal protective equipment where necessary

Health authorities advise that surgical masks in the community are only helpful in preventing people who have COVID-19 infection from spreading it to others. If you are feeling well, there is no need to wear a surgical mask, as there is little evidence to support their use in healthy people to prevent transmission of viruses. Likewise, if you are feeling well, there is no need to use gloves in the community as it can lead to complacency and reduced handwashing, potentially increasing the risk of exposure to the virus. PPE should be worn by those who clean areas that have been used by people with suspected or confirmed infection.

Healthcare workers and other frontline workers who have close contact with people with suspected or confirmed infection should wear PPE as advised by health authorities, including [Queensland Health](#).

Example: Health care sector

In addition to appropriate controls outlined in this document, workers in a healthcare setting should refer to Queensland Health for advice on appropriate additional measures, including the selection and use of appropriate PPE.

Managing symptoms of COVID-19 at work

If a person develops flu-like symptoms at work, separate the person by placing them in an area away from others. Provide them with tissues, hand sanitiser and a face mask, if available, to cover their coughs and sneezes. Inform their supervisor and arrange for the person to be sent home or to access medical assistance.

Clean and disinfect their workstation and other areas they have been (refer to sections on *Cleaning*). Queensland Health will contact an employer if contact tracing of the workplace is required. The employer should follow the advice provided by Queensland Health.

Managing psychosocial risks

A psychosocial hazard is anything in the design or management of work that causes stress. Stress is the reaction a person has when we perceive the demands of their work exceed their ability or resources to cope. Work-related stress if prolonged and/or severe can cause both psychological and physical injury. Stress itself does not constitute an injury. To manage stress from COVID-19 employers should:

- regularly ask workers how they are going and if there are any work-related stressors that need to be addressed
- be well informed with information from official sources, regularly communicate with workers and share relevant information as it comes to hand
- consult your workers on any risks to their psychological health and how these can be managed
- provide workers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns and to find workplace information in a central place
- inform workers about their entitlements if they become unfit for work or have caring responsibilities
- proactively support workers who you identify may be more at risk of a work-related psychological injury (e.g. frontline workers or those working from home)
- refer workers to appropriate channels to support mental health and wellbeing, such as employee assistance programs.

Further information managing risks to psychological health during COVID-19 pandemic has been provided by [Safe Work Australia](#).

Communicate with workers

- be aware of how to spot [COVID-19 symptoms](#) (including fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue or tiredness and shortness of breath) and make sure workers do not come to work if they are unwell
- provide workers with adequate information and training in relation to COVID-19 measures, including:
 - changes to work tasks and practices
 - appropriate cleaning and disinfection practices at work
- put [signs and posters](#) up and around the workplace to remind workers and others of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures that are necessary to stop its spread.

3. Report and notification of COVID-19

- If there is a confirmed or probable diagnosis of COVID-19 infection in a person who is part of your workplace, Queensland Health will be notified by the medical professional who confirms the diagnosis and the laboratory that completed the test.

- To avoid duplication of reporting, employers do not need to notify WHSQ that the case has been confirmed.
- WHSQ will respond to all requests for advice or assistance on COVID-19 related matters. Our inspectors will continue to ensure businesses are complying with requirements to prevent exposure to unacceptable health and safety risks.
- WHSQ will continue to liaise with Queensland Health on work health and safety-related notifications. To raise a concern about a work health and safety issue, use our online form or call 1300 362 128. For non-COVID-19 notifiable incidents, use our incident notification form [here](#).

Workers' responsibilities in relation to COVID-19

Workers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the health and safety of other persons in the workplace.

What does a worker do if they test positive for COVID-19?

Queensland Health will contact you if you have a positive test for COVID-19. You must [self-isolate](#) and follow the instructions of health authorities. You should inform your supervisor of your diagnosis and you must not attend work.

Queensland Health will contact your employer, if required, for the purpose of contact tracing and will advise on what actions are required to protect other workers who may have had close contact with you.

When can a worker return to work if they have COVID-19?

Your health care provider will advise you when you are no longer infectious and can return to work.

What should a worker do if they have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?

Queensland Health will undertake contact tracing. This involves identifying people who have had close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19 infection. If you are considered a close contact, you will be directed to [self-quarantine](#) and provided with information to prevent the further spread of infection. People who are not close contacts do not have to go into quarantine but should be alert to the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, monitor their health and continue to practice recommended social distancing and hygiene measures.

When can a worker return to work after self-quarantine?

If you have self-quarantined for 14 days without any symptoms, you can return to work. If you need a medical certificate you should see your GP. If you have tested negative for COVID-19 during this period, you must remain in quarantine for the full 14 days. You should seek medical attention immediately if you develop symptoms while in self-quarantine.

What happens if a worker develops symptoms while they are in self-quarantine?

If you develop symptoms while you are in self-quarantine, you should seek medical attention immediately from your GP or a Fever Clinic. Call ahead to let the doctor or clinic know you are under quarantine so they can prepare for your arrival. If you are tested for COVID-19, you must remain in quarantine while waiting for the test results. If your test comes back negative, you are still required to complete the rest of your quarantine period. If you test positive for COVID-19 infection you will be required to [self-isolate](#).

For more information about contact tracing, quarantine or isolation contact Queensland Health on 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or visit www.health.qld.gov.au.

Note

Publishing note - Printable as PDF so the guide can be pinned to noticeboards at workplaces.



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