National guide for safe workplaces – COVID-19

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the way people live and work. Australian workplaces of all sizes and across all industries have had to significantly modify their operations to protect their workers and the broader community. Until there is an effective vaccine or treatment, there can be no return to business as usual. Workplaces must find a 'new normal' and must continue implementing measures to reduce the spread of the virus, respond to the re-emergence of cases and to play their part in preventing health systems from being overwhelmed and preventing unnecessary deaths.

COVID-19 is a public health matter, which means the risks associated with COVID-19 in the workplace must be managed in accordance with public health laws in the state or territory the business is located. Depending on the state or territory, there may be a number of public health laws that determine what businesses can and cannot do during this pandemic, including whether they need to prepare a COVIDSafe plan. Everyone must always follow the rules that apply in their state or territory. More information on public health laws and COVIDSafe plans is available on the Safe Work Australia website.

What is the purpose of this Guide and who is it for?

This Guide is to assist persons conducting a business or undertaking (e.g. employers) meet their work health and safety (WHS) duties in relation to COVID-19 given the significant risk this disease presents to the health and safety of people at the workplace. Managing WHS risks during the pandemic requires flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and an ability to adapt as more becomes known about the virus and how its transmission can be managed and prevented.

Safe Work Australia has published a range of general and industry-specific advice, guidance and resources on its website to help create and maintain a safe workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. This Guide aligns with and complements the existing guidance. It provides practical advice for WHS duty holders about how to work safely during the pandemic. It can be used by any duty holders under the model WHS laws that have a role in managing the risk of COVID-19, including persons conducting a business or undertaking, persons with management or control of the workplace and 'officers'.

More information on WHS duties is available on our website. Our information on officers' duties may also assist.

How to use this Guide

This document provides guidance to assist businesses determine how best to manage the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace. It provides a framework that complements and links to more detailed advice on the Safe Work Australia website. This document is not intended to prescribe specific approaches, but instead seeks to help businesses determine what is appropriate for their individual workplaces and circumstances.

In this Guide, the following terms are used:

- *must* – indicates a legal requirement that businesses must comply with
- *should* – indicates a recommendation
- *may* – indicates a permission
- *can* – indicates a possibility or a capability.

The Guide uses a 'Plan', 'Implement', 'Monitor' and 'Improve' approach to risk management of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Plan: Plan what businesses should do to work safely. This includes conducting a risk assessment regarding COVID-19 in the workplace.

Implement: Put into practice the control measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Monitor: Keep checking to see how well the control measures are working.

Improve: Address any issues and find ways to make what the business is doing even more effective.

2. Plan

The way that businesses must and should operate has changed in the new environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic, as there is now an ongoing, increased risk to health and safety while at work. Effective and comprehensive planning, including conducting a risk assessment in relation to COVID-19 in the workplace, is crucial to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Businesses need to manage the risk of persons in the workplace spreading and contracting COVID-19, including the risk that persons with COVID-19 enter the workplace. During the planning phase businesses should consider their operations in detail and identify and determine the most effective control measures to manage the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the workplace. It can assess which control measures are reasonably practicable in the circumstances, taking into account each business's unique characteristics and other features.

Note, in addition to identifying risks and ways to control them, the planning phase should also cover how the business is going to resource any measures that it determines appropriate. It must also determine how to effectively consult with workers on steps that may be taken to protect them from COVID-19 in the workplace.

Consultation and coordination

Businesses must consult with workers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. This means workers must be consulted when businesses are:

- assessing the risk COVID-19 presents to the health and safety of workers
- deciding on control measures to eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19
- deciding on the adequacy of facilities for the welfare of workers (for example hand washing facilities), and
- proposing other changes to the workplace as a result of COVID-19 which may affect health and safety.

Consultation should begin as early as possible and be done in a way that enables workers to express their views on WHS issues. Businesses should also ensure workers understand what is expected of them and how to raise any concerns they have.

If a business has agreed to procedures for consultation then these must be followed, including consulting with any health and safety representatives (HSRs).

Workers' views must genuinely be taken into account when making decisions and workers must be informed about consultation outcomes and decisions about health and safety.

Consultation is a continuous process and workers should be able to raise issues or concerns at any time.

Businesses must also consult, cooperate and coordinate with others that they share a WHS duty with. This may include other businesses that they work with or share a premises with, such as contractors, managing agents, landlords and other tenants. This means exchanging information and working together to eliminate or minimise health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes both day to day operations and emergency planning.

Further information on <u>emergency planning can be found on our website</u>, including a <u>fact sheet on general emergency plans for fixed workplaces</u>. See also our information on <u>COVID-19 in the workplace.</u>

For more information see our <u>COVID-19 consultation web page</u> and the <u>model Code of Practice: Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination.</u>

Conducting a risk assessment for COVID-19

Businesses should treat the risk of COVID-19 in the same manner as any other workplace hazard and apply a risk management approach. This involves conducting a detailed risk assessment in accordance with standard risk management processes.

A risk assessment involves four steps – identifying hazards, assessing risks (including the likelihood of them eventuating), controlling the risks and reviewing these controls regularly. These steps remain the same whether the business is conducting a risk assessment in relation to work health and safety generally, or specifically in relation to COVID-19.

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through contact with droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The droplets may fall directly onto the person's eyes, nose or mouth if they are in close contact with the infected person. A person may also be infected if they touch a surface contaminated with the droplets and then touch their mouth nose or eyes before washing their hands.

Conducting a risk assessment in relation to COVID-19 involves giving consideration to all the ways a person can come into contact with respiratory droplets and implementing control measures to minimise the likelihood that they will.

With this in mind, to conduct a COVID-19 risk assessment, businesses should:

- identify all of the activities or situations where people in the workplace may contract COVID-19 from each other or from a surface
- assess the level of risk that people in these activities or situations may contract and spread COVID-19 in the workplace. The level of risk associated with exposure to COVID-19 may not be the same for all businesses and will depend on a range of factors, including the geographic location, business size, workforce demographics and characteristics (such as whether the business has any <u>vulnerable workers</u>), as well as:
  - o the nature of the workplace, such as whether it is a factory, an office, a construction site
  - o the work tasks and activities undertaken at the workplace, for example is there significant interaction with customers, do any work tasks require workers to be in close proximity to be carried out safely
  - o the working arrangements of the workers, for example is there shift work involved, do workers share facilities and break times.
- determine what control measures are reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

More information about conducting a risk assessment is available at the following links:

- our COVID-19 <u>risk assessment web page</u>

- our key considerations for undertaking a risk assessment – COVID-19 document
- our template and example risk register
- workplace checklist – what can I do to keep my workers safe at the workplace and limit the spread of COVID-19
- our model Code of Practice: How to manage WHS risks
- our small business planning tool – COVID-19 also has some targeted information to assist small businesses with conducting a risk assessment.

Identifying activities and situations where people may contract COVID-19

When identifying the activities or situations where people in the workplace may contract COVID-19 from each other or from a surface, businesses will need to assess:

- work tasks, workflows or processes carried out at the workplace, such as using shared equipment
- areas where workers may be in close proximity, such as in offices, behind the counter at a café or retail store or shared areas such as break rooms or kitchens
- interactions between workers, including when travelling to and from work (for example when carpooling) and when on a meal or rest break
- interactions between workers and customers or other people who attend the workplace, for example delivery drivers
- interactions between visitors at the workplace, for example people who are not part of the same household, and
- high touch surfaces at the workplace which may become contaminated, such as door handles, taps or access control points such as keypads.

Assessing the risks

To effectively conduct a risk assessment for COVID-19, businesses must understand the broader context within which they are operating. This will help to accurately assess the risks associated with COVID-19 in the workplace and the likelihood of it happening, and will equip businesses to respond in a balanced and proportionate way.

The business context is impacted by both external issues such as the status of the pandemic in the geographic location of the workplace (for example, whether there is current evidence of community transmission of the virus) and workers, as well as internal issues like the structure of the business and worker demographics.

Some of the external issues that businesses may wish to consider include (but are not limited to):

- public health laws
- rates of COVID-19 in the local community
- how workers travel to and from work – where large numbers of workers have no other option but to use public transport businesses may need to:
  - clearly communicate ways they can minimise the risks associated with COVID-19 while on public transport and direct them to appropriate resources to help with this, or

- o put in place arrangements such as staggering start and finish times to prevent large numbers of workers travelling at peak hour and arriving at the same time, causing congestion in common areas like foyers
- workers' personal circumstances, such as whether they have been classified as a vulnerable worker, have caring responsibilities for a vulnerable person or there is a vulnerable person in their household
- issues regarding access to childcare and schools in the community at the particular point in time and stage of restrictions currently active in the jurisdiction the business is located in – this may impact the business's application of its working from home policy (if working from home is possible in the industry the business is operating in)
- changes in customer expectations or behaviours
- supply chain issues, including demand or availability of products/services, and
- increased or decreased demand for products/services.

Internal parts of the business for consideration during the risk assessment process may include (but are not limited to):

- the size and nature of the workplace:
  - o number and location of workplaces within the business
  - o type of workplaces - for example whether they are an office, retail outlet, factory, warehouse, in-home servicer or other type of workplace
  - o physical layout of the workplace in accommodating physical distancing measures
  - o facilities available to manage the risks associated with COVID-19, such as adequate provision of handwashing facilities.
- the size and nature of the workforce, for example:
  - o a high proportion of casual workers without access to paid leave
  - o whether there are vulnerable workers who may be more likely to experience serious illness if they contract the virus
- the nature and organisation of work tasks carried out at the workplace, for example:
  - o whether the job roles involve significant interaction with other workers, customers/clients or other people
  - o how work is organised for the duration of the pandemic including processes to manage any increased worker absences (due to sickness, self-isolation or quarantine requirements etc.) – where work tasks need to be performed by two or more workers to be done safely, consideration may need to be given to whether these tasks can be rescheduled if there is a reduced workforce due to circumstances related to the pandemic.

Controlling the risks

As for all WHS risks, businesses must eliminate, or if not possible, minimise risks to workers and others at the workplace so far as is reasonably practicable. While it is not possible to eliminate the risks related to COVID-19, proper planning and implementation of controls will ensure risks in workplaces arising from the pandemic are minimised.

There is clear health advice about how to reduce the risk of contact and droplet spread from a person, directly or indirectly, and from contaminated surfaces including:

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- ensuring people with symptoms of COVID-19 do not come to work
- screening workers
- maintaining physical distancing
- practicing good personal hygiene (including handwashing)
- engaging in routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces
- providing personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate, and
- contact tracing.

For industry specific guidance that may assist with determining how the risks of COVID-19 can be controlled through these mechanisms, visit our website.

Ensuring people with COVID-19 symptoms do not come to work

A key control measure businesses can implement to minimise the risks associated with COVID-19 is to take steps to ensure that workers and other people who have COVID-19 symptoms do not attend the workplace. Consider:

- providing education and training and placing signage to increase awareness of COVID-19 symptoms and what a person should do if they have symptoms including:
  - o not coming to work or isolating or quarantining, where instructed by health officials
  - o the steps to follow if they develop symptoms at work
  - o when to seek medical advice and get tested
- supporting workers to access testing, stay home if they have symptoms and implementing remote working options for workers in isolation or quarantine, if possible, and
- workplace policies and procedures to manage cases or outbreaks of COVID-19 in the workplace.

For information about what do someone at the workplace has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, see our information on COVID-19 in the workplace.

Screening workers

Businesses may consider implementing a process to screen workers before they enter the workplace. This could include:

- reminding workers of the common symptoms of COVID-19 and that they should not be at work if they have or have had any of the common symptoms in the last 48 hours
- asking workers if they have recently travelled or been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, and
- conducting temperature checks with touch-free thermometers. Temperature checks can be used in combination with other measures but they should not be solely relied on. Temperature checks do not indicate whether a person has COVID-19. A person could have a temperature for another reason unrelated to COVID-19, and people with COVID-19 may also be asymptomatic or on medication that reduces their temperature.

For more information on temperature checks and related health monitoring measures, see our information on health monitoring.

Physical distancing

Physical distancing (also referred to as 'social distancing') refers to the requirement that people distance themselves from others.

By implementing physical distancing controls, businesses reduce the risk of a person in the workplace spreading and contracting COVID-19, including the risk that persons with COVID-19 enter the workplace.

What physical distancing measures your business needs to implement will depend on the nature of the workplace (for example, is it a construction site, factory, office etc.), the nature of the work tasks and activities that take place at the workplace (for example are there tasks that require workers to be in close proximity to be carried out safely such as lifting heavy objects etc.) and the working arrangements of the workers (for example whether there are shifts involved).

Any physical distancing controls businesses implement in the workplace should be focused on:

Limiting the number of people in the workplace based on public health directions in the state or territory the business is located in and to ensure each person can maintain a physical distance of 1.5 metres.

Modifying workflows and processes so that work tasks are carried out in a way that minimises interactions between people. This includes reducing the time spent in close proximity. Although it may be difficult for workers in some industries to maintain physical distancing, for example in a restaurant or café when behind the counter or when in the kitchen, businesses must still implement measures to maximise the distance between people to the extent it is safe and possible to do so. Where the interaction is unavoidable, businesses must also minimise the time that workers are in close contact, and if appropriate, provide workers with PPE.

Ensuring the physical layout of the workplace supports physical distancing. To support people physical distancing businesses will need to ensure the layout of the workplace enables people to keep 1.5 metres apart. This includes in shared spaces such as amenities, waiting areas, dining areas and worker only areas such as kitchen preparation areas. The new layout must allow for workers and other people to enter, exit and move about the workplace both under normal working conditions and in an emergency without risks to their health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Refer to our risk assessment web page and our Guide on how to determine what is reasonably practicable for further information.

Remember, in determining how to comply with physical distancing requirements, businesses must comply with public health directions that apply to their industry in their state and territory (e.g. limits on indoor gatherings for some activities). Businesses must also consult with workers and their representatives. See our consultation section below or refer to our model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination and our consultation web page for more assistance.

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Examples of physical distancing control measures

Depending on the nature of the workplace, the nature of the tasks and activities carried out at the workplace and the working arrangements of workers, businesses may wish to consider the following control measures:

- To limit the number of people in the workplace, consider:
    - facilitating working from home arrangements wherever possible. See our working from home web page for more information on what to do if workers are working from home
    - staggering shifts, start and finish times and break times
    - restricting access to essential visitors only. If relevant, businesses could complement this with revised schedules for essential visitors to the workplace to reduce interaction, such as outside normal hours if possible
    - determining the maximum number of people that can be at the premises and use signage and posters to remind people of the limits – ensure there are processes in place to abide by any maximum gathering limitations in place under public health directions
    - limiting how long people can be in common areas, and/or
    - where face-to-face meetings or training is essential, limiting participation to the minimum number of people.
- When modifying work flows and processes so that work tasks are carried out in a way that minimises interactions between people, businesses may wish to:
    - identify any activities where workers directly pass items to each other or to other people at the workplace, such as spare parts or samples and either cease these activities (if the level of risk that has been assessed in relation to COVID-19 warrants it) or establish ways to continue them that do not require workers and others to be in close proximity
    - where certain activities must be carried out in close proximity, such as hair and beauty treatments, consider limiting the time workers and others are in close proximity
    - use electronic devices for ordering food and drink if the business is a bar, restaurant or café
    - separate workers into dedicated teams and have them work the same shift or work in a particular area and consider whether these dedicated teams can have access to their own meal areas or break facilities – this will limit overall interactions between all workers, and/or
    - where interactions between people are frequent and/or unavoidable, for example in a retail store or supermarket, consider providing physical barriers such as screens at the customer service desks.
- To ensure the physical layout of the workplace supports physical distancing, businesses may wish to consider:
    - redesigning the layout of the workplace and workflows, including creating one-way systems in corridors, stairways and other common areas if possible
    - spreading out plant (equipment) or furniture where there is space to do so, including in common areas such as break room, to enable physical distancing requirements to be met

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- o providing separate entry and exit points
- o limiting access to the workplace or parts of the workplace to only workers that need to be there
- o working with the building manager (if relevant) to ensure physical distancing can be maintained in lifts at the workplace if relevant – our case study on lifts may assist.

Hygiene

Everyone must continue to practise good hygiene at all times to prevent the virus spreading.

Good hygiene requires everyone to wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry them completely, preferably with clean, single-use paper towel.

Businesses should ensure that:

- there are adequate and accessible facilities to achieve good hygiene
- facilities are in good working order, are clean and are otherwise safe, and
- facilities are properly stocked and have adequate supplies of toilet paper, soap, water, and drying facilities (preferably single-use paper towels).

When determining what facilities a business may need, consider the number of workers and other people entering the workplace, any shift arrangements and when access to these facilities is required. Depending on the circumstances, businesses may need to:

- provide additional facilities, including washing facilities and change rooms
- relocate facilities to more convenient locations, for example entry and exits, and
- provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser (with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient) in appropriate locations, such as entry and exits, if there are limited hand washing facilities available. Hand sanitiser must be used as per the manufacturer's instructions.

Our hygiene web page and our health, hygiene and facilities checklist have more information to assist businesses.

Measures to enhance good hygiene

Examples of measures to enhance good hygiene outcomes include:
- developing infection control policies in consultation with the workers. These policies should outline measures in place to prevent the spread of infectious diseases at the workplace. Communicate these policies to workers
- training workers on the importance of washing their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and drying them correctly, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- placing posters near handwashing facilities showing how to correctly wash and dry hands (for example, if hand dryers are used, place posters advising that hands should be dried completely before finishing) and clean hands with sanitiser
- informing workers and other people entering the workplace of workplace hygiene standards that are expected, including when utilising common areas (cleaning up afterwards, placing rubbish in bins provided, avoiding putting items such as phones on meal surfaces, etc.)

- where relevant, displaying signs in the business's front window (or other appropriate place) informing people entering the workplace of the expectations and not to enter if they have symptoms of COVID-19
- removing unnecessary items from the workplace, such as public access to flyers, product samples, books and magazines, and
- ensuring high use items (such as pens, EFTPOS machines and menus) and equipment are cleaned and disinfected before re-using.

Where relevant, businesses may wish to inform customers, clients or guests of these expectations when making reservations. If they are making a reservation over the phone, have a template written out for workers to read to them. If booking online, add additional text to the booking confirmation setting out clear expectations.

Cleaning and disinfecting

A key way businesses can protect workers and others from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is by implementing appropriate **cleaning** and **disinfecting** measures for the workplace.

Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is a surfactant that is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work.

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs (bacteria and viruses) on surfaces. It's important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. The following disinfectants are suitable for use on hard surfaces (that is, surfaces where any spilt liquid pools, and does not soak in): alcohol in a concentration of at least 70%, chlorine bleach in a concentration of 1000 parts per million, oxygen bleach, or wipes and sprays that contain quaternary ammonium compounds. These chemicals will be labelled as 'disinfectant' on the packaging and must be diluted or used following the instructions on the packaging to be effective. Health authorities recommend using a 1000 parts per million bleach (sodium hypochlorite) solution to disinfect hard surfaces.

> Note: Disinfectants require sufficient contact time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. For routine workplace cleaning in a non-healthcare workplace, physical cleaning with water and detergent is usually sufficient.

The frequency of cleaning required will depend on the circumstances.

- it is highly recommended that workplaces are **cleaned** at least daily
- when and how often the workplace should be **disinfected** will depend on the likelihood of contaminated material being present
- businesses may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant
- more frequent cleaning may be required in some circumstances. For example, if equipment is shared between workers, it should be cleaned between uses, where practicable. More frequent disinfection may also be required at workplaces with a high volume of customers or visitors that are likely to touch surfaces, and

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- cleaning and disinfection should be used where there is a high volume of workers, customers or visitors that are likely to touch surfaces. Cleaning and disinfection should also be undertaken after a person with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 has recently been at the workplace.

The recommended minimum frequencies for routine cleaning of various surfaces and items in the workplace, as well as recommended cleaning and disinfecting following a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is outlined in the COVID-19 cleaning guide.

When implementing cleaning measures, it is important to remember the following precautions:

- where cleaning on or around electrical equipment/fittings, isolate electrical equipment and turn off power source if possible before cleaning with liquids
- read the label for the detergent or disinfectant and follow the manufacturer's recommendations
- obtain a copy of the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for the detergent or disinfectant and become familiar with the contents, and
- wear the appropriate PPE that is identified on the label and the SDS.

If a business operates in a shared premises WHS duty holders must consult, coordinate and cooperate with other employers, the building owner and facilities manager and any other relevant people to ensure that appropriate cleaning measures are implemented, for example in shared facilities such as lobbies, lifts, change rooms and common meeting spaces.

Refer to the cleaning web page for more assistance.

Personal Protective Equipment

PPE refers to anything used or worn to minimise risk to worker health and safety. Common PPE that can be used to protect against COVID-19 include face masks, gloves, eye protection and screens. The use of some types of masks, gowns and disposable suits is generally restricted to health care settings and it is usually not recommended that these types of PPE are used outside of health care to protect against COVID-19.

Remember, depending on the status of the pandemic in particular jurisdictions, there may be requirements in place regarding the use of masks or other PPE in the workplace as well as in the community more broadly. Always keep up to date on any requirements in place to respond to COVID-19 by visiting the relevant state and territory government website. Our public health directions web page may also be a useful starting point.

Aside from any public health directions or recommendations regarding masks or other PPE, the type of PPE provided will depend on the workplace and the outcomes of consultation and the risk assessment. Businesses should also closely monitor the information being provided by your state and territory about wearing masks in the community and ensure that any recommendations or directions are followed in the workplace.

PPE alone will not protect workers and should be used in conjunction with other control measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, including good hygiene measures, physical distancing (keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart), cleaning and

disinfecting, providing workers with information and training, and supporting workers to work from home where practicable.

For more information see our web page on PPE, as well as our specific information on masks and gloves. To keep up to date with any public health directions in place in the jurisdiction the business is operating in, that may relate to masks or other PPE, visit our public health directions web page or your state and territory government website.

Contact tracing and the COVIDSafe app

Contact tracing is the process of identifying, assessing and managing people who have been exposed to a disease, such as COVID-19, to prevent transmission. In conjunction with the other control measures outlined in this Guide, contact tracing can help slow the spread of COVID-19.

If a worker or other person that has been at the workplace is diagnosed with COVID-19, the state and territory public health unit will trace and contact individuals the infected worker or other person was in contact with and provide them with instructions to self-isolate.

Contact tracing usually relies on the infected person's recollection of individuals they have been in contact with. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government has released the COVIDSafe app.

The COVIDSafe app securely records (for 21 days) the 'reference codes' of other app users it detects using Bluetooth. This information can be provided to state and territory health authorities if a user is infected with COVID-19 and can help notify other app users the infected person has been in contact with. For more information on the COVIDSafe app visit the Department of Health website.

The Australian Government encourages all Australians to download the COVIDSafe app, but it is voluntary. Businesses must not require a worker or other person including customers to download or use COVIDSafe. This includes requiring workers to download COVIDSafe onto work issued and private mobile phones. For further information on this topic see our COVIDSafe app guidance.

Businesses seeking to inform their workers about the COVIDSafe app may wish to use the signage and posters provided on our signage and posters – COVID-19 web page.

Addressing new WHS risks

When planning to address risks related to COVID-19, businesses should also take into account any existing WHS risks and control measures already in place to manage these. The business should:

- assess whether existing WHS control measures need to be adjusted
- consider new WHS risks and other risks that may be introduced – including risks of work-related violence, specific risks associated with working from home and risks to mental health, and
- implement control measures to address new risks.

Preparing the workplace for workers to return

Prior to workers returning to the workplace after a period of shutdown or restricted operations, all businesses must ensure their workplaces are safe to use.

As part of the risk assessment, to prepare for safe operation on the premises—that is, the actual building or work site where work is performed—businesses should consider the following:

- **assess** all premises, sites or parts of sites, including those that have been closed or partially operating and ensure they are safe to use
- perform **maintenance checks** and activities on equipment and systems, including heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems and other water-based systems as these may create risks related to Legionella, particularly if they have been shut down or used less for a period of time. See our web page on HVACs for more information.
    - other specialist equipment may also need to be restarted and tested if it has been unused for longer than usual, and
- **deep cleaning of workplaces and equipment** prior to workers arriving at the workplace and/or disinfection of taps, showers and other 'end of trip' facilities such as lockers and bicycle cages before workers are due to arrive at the workplace. If the workplace has been unoccupied for more than 3-4 consecutive days, this may not be required

For further guidance on returning to the workplace after a period of shutdown or restricted operations, see our guidance on transitioning back to the usual workplace and our accompanying checklist.

Working in a person's home

For a number of businesses and industries, the 'workplace' will be a person's home.

When preparing for workers to recommence work activities in other people's homes after ceasing or reducing frequency of visits during the pandemic, businesses should:

- check if anyone in the household has symptoms of COVID-19 or has been advised to self-isolate. Do not send workers to the household if that is the case
- consider whether the work can be performed using digital or remote alternatives such as video or phone conferences
- communicate with households prior to work commencing to discuss and agree how work will be carried out and general practices to minimise risks – for example how to enter the premises without face-to-face contact, maintaining physical distancing while the worker is in the home, leaving doors open to minimise the need to touch door handles
- assign workers to work in households local to them where possible to minimise travel and use of public transport, and
- allocate the same individual, pairs or small teams of workers to a household if repeat visits are necessary or the work is ongoing.

Safe Work Australia has detailed guidance on managing the risks associated with COVID-19 for businesses operating in an industry that provides in-house services. Refer to our in-home services web page for further information.

Working in mobile workplaces or workers in multiple locations

Some work cannot be performed at home or in a fixed physical workplace (e.g. consultants, drivers, social and personal care providers, cleaners, postal workers, delivery workers, traffic wardens, repair and maintenance workers).

Businesses should ensure that these workers are given support, guidance and adequate resources to work safely and to avoid transmission of the disease through travel and interaction with other people.

In general, businesses with mobile workplaces or workers in multiple locations should:

- consider whether the work can be performed using digital or remote alternatives such as video or phone conferences
- where the work would usually require multiple workers visiting a premises, consider whether the on-site work could be completed by a smaller number of workers, with other workers assisting remotely
- where working at different locations, consider how physical distancing can be achieved at those locations (see our industry web pages for ideas about physical distancing measures for particular workplaces)
- businesses should advise their workers that they may refuse to enter a workplace or to leave at any time if agreed control measures regarding COVID-19 are not in place or are breached – see our information on workers' rights
- where workers are travelling to a location in a shared vehicle or transport, ensure only every second seat is filled, windows left open and air conditioning set to external airflow to limit the use of re-circulated air
- provide access to alcohol-based hand sanitiser and PPE, as appropriate, and
- keep detailed information about the places workers go and people they have prolonged interaction or close contact with in the course of their work, to assist with contact tracing if required.

Safe Work Australia has detailed guidance on managing the risks associated with COVID-19 for businesses operating in a mobile industry. We also have specific information for employers, small businesses and workers in the private security industry that may work in a number of different locations.

3. Implement

Effective implementation of the control measures discussed above to limit the spread of COVID-19 requires relevant workplace policies and clear and comprehensive communication with workers and others at the workplace.

Workplace policies

You will need to review and, if necessary, update any WHS policies and your emergency plan, in consultation with workers and health and safety representatives (HSRs). Consider how you will manage and respond to a potential further outbreak of COVID-19. You should share relevant information with workers and HSRs about any WHS policies you have put in place or updated in response to COVID-19 (for example, incident reporting processes) and any changes to emergency plans.

A workplace must have a policy and accompanying procedures that require workers and other persons to not attend the workplace if:

- they have symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough and sore throat
- are in isolation, for example because they have returned from overseas, or
- have been in close contact with a person who has, or has been tested for, COVID-19.

Importantly, this policy should be clearly communicated with workers prior to their first return to the workplace or immediately upon returning and at subsequent regular intervals. Posters or signage around the workplace can help remind workers and others at the workplace of their obligations if they are showing symptoms of COVID-19.

Workers must follow any reasonable health and safety instructions of their employer. To help with communicating these policies, businesses can use some of our signage and posters on topics associated with COVID-19.

Communication about COVID-19

Businesses must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the provision of any information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety arising from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business.

In a COVID-19 environment this includes providing workers with:

- up to date information on COVID-19 – you will need to check the latest health and Commonwealth, state and territory government advice
- clear guidance on physical distancing, hygiene and other matters, including through use of signs and posters in the workplace (available on our website)
- control measures in place at the workplace to manage the risks of COVID-19, including any new ways of working
- any training that is necessary to address risks in the workplace, including on how to perform tasks differently or the use of PPE

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- information on their workplace entitlements (such as access to paid leave) if they have COVID-19 symptoms or they are required to self-isolate
- clear expectations and procedures, in consultation with workers and their representatives, on what will happen if a worker contracts COVID-19, and
- advice on how to report concerns or safety incidents.

All businesses should use a combination of formal and informal communication methods (e.g. intranet, website, email, signs, posters and others) to ensure accessibility, including people for whom English is a second language and people with differing levels of literacy.

Businesses should communicate relevant information about operational changes, safety measures and controls to suppliers, customers and other relevant interested parties

Communication with workers and other people should be two-way and methods should facilitate ongoing conversation as well as more formal consultation.

Communication should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is effective. Businesses should ensure ongoing engagement with workers and their representatives to monitor and understand any unforeseen impacts of changes to ways of working, how work is organised and workplaces, and communicate regularly with workers, including those working remotely, to check mental health and wellbeing.

Communication on transitioning back to the usual workplace

Businesses should take all reasonable measures to ensure workers understand the behaviours, processes and working practices required to manage the risk of transmission of COVID-19 before returning to a workplace.

In addition to the actions set out above, before workers return to the usual workplace, you should, depending on your circumstances:

- modify workplace attendance arrangements where the organisation cannot maintain physical distancing in the workplace (for example, rostering workers to work from the office or home on different days or alternative weeks, staggering shifts or facilitating more flexible start and finish times)
- review workplace checklists and re-design the workplace environment, procedures and practices to ensure physical distancing, cleaning and hygiene
- ensure workstations are correctly set up to protect against musculoskeletal injuries (for example, provide guidance to your workers on how to set up a safe work environment)
- consider arrangements for deliveries, contractors and visitors attending the workplace (for example, organising contactless deliveries and limiting non-essential visitors)
- provide workers with PPE where appropriate, as well as appropriate cleaning, disinfectant and hygiene products. You should also provide proper training and instruction in the use of any PPE and cleaning, disinfectant and hygiene products provided
- communicate new policies and procedures for entering the workplace, beginning work and the use of common areas (e.g. lifts, stairs, toilets and kitchens) and
- appoint a contact person in your business that workers can talk to about any concerns.

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4. Monitor

As for any WHS risks and controls, businesses should closely monitor the effectiveness of measures introduced to control risks arising from COVID-19.

To do this, you should consult your workers and their HSRs and consider the following:

- are the control measures working effectively in both their design and operation?
- have the control measures introduced any new problems?
- have all risks associated with COVID-19 in the workplace been identified?
- have new work methods made the job safer?
- are new safety procedures for COVID-19 being followed?
- have the instruction and training provided to workers on how to work safely in a COVID-19 environment been successful?
- are workers actively involved in identifying risks and possible control measures? Are they openly raising COVID-19 concerns and reporting problems promptly?
- have any incidents relating to COVID-19 been identified or reported?
- if new information on COVID-19 becomes available, does it indicate current controls may no longer be the most effective?

For further guidance, see our model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks, which includes specific information on monitoring the effectiveness of control measures.

5. Improve

Businesses should actively consider the results of monitoring and review of COVID-19 control measures and address any issues of concern, in consultation with workers and their representatives.

All businesses should ensure they:

- take immediate actions to improve or change any control measures that are not effective
- implement additional control measures if needed, and
- address changes to the external and internal issues that can affect health and safety at work including any changes to public health directions. Some of these are listed above in the section on 'Assessing the risks'