

|  |
| --- |
| Preparing for a case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace |
| How to prepare and what to expect11 July 2020 |

# What can workplaces do now?

## Measures that can help reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace

### General measures

* If your staff can work from home, they must work from home.
* If your staff cannot work from home, you should encourage flexible working arrangements, including off-peak travel.
* If your employees are unwell, they must stay home.
* Consider if work-related travel by your staff is necessary and delay where possible.
* Plan contingencies for a potential increase of staff absences because people are self-isolating, self-quarantining or staying home because they are unwell to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).
* Plan for what to do if staff arrive unwell at work (e.g. identify an isolation room or separated area).
* Display coronavirus (COVID-19) education materials, these can be downloaded and printed <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/preventing-infection-workplace-covid-19#resources>
* Minimise staff movements between areas and cross-over between shifts.
* Consult with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and keep staff informed of the actions you are taking.
* Socialising among workers has been responsible for some of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This includes carpooling, huddling together at meal breaks or smoking in groups without physical distancing or sharing items such as cigarette lighters and cutlery. Workers should be encouraged to maintain 1.5 metres of distance from their work colleagues at all times and avoid sharing items.

For further information see Worksafe Victoria <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19> and DHHS of Health and Human Services (DHHS) guidance for businesses and workplaces at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/planning-and-responding-coronavirus-covid-19> and <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/preventing-infection-workplace-covid-19>

### Slowing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19)

To slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), employers need to ensure the following measures in a workplace:

* Provide and promote hand sanitisers, including at building entrances.
* Increase environmental cleaning, including between changes of staff.
* Regularly clean with disinfectant high-touch surfaces - at least twice daily) - including desks, doors and door handles, keyboards and lifts, including lift buttons and handrails.
* In a change room, provide adequate supplies so staff do not share items, such as towels and soap bars, and encourage staff to wash their hands after changing.
* Open windows and adjust air conditioning to enhance airflow. Ensure the highest hygiene practices among food handlers and canteen staff.
* Purchase supplies to help limit infection, for example alcohol sanitisers and soap.

### Physical distancing

The following measures need to be used to promote physical distancing in a workplace:

* Plan ways to enable physical distancing of at least 1.5 meters to reduce person-to-person contact for staff and clients.
* In an enclosed workspace there should be on average no more than one person per four square meters of floor space.
* If possible, designate specific doorways as entry-only and exit-only and aim to keep people walking in the same direction through the workplace.
* Avoid indoor meetings and lunchrooms. Encourage online meetings.
* Workplaces that have areas accessible to the public will also be subject to density quotient and signage requirements and those subject to Stay at Home restrictions will be subject to further specific restrictions. For the most up to date restrictions in place in Victoria see <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>
* Provide a clearly visible sign for customers and staff stating how many people are allowed in your premise. For information on signs and signage templates see the [Business Victoria website](https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support) [https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support](https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support%20https%3A//www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support)

### Cleaning and disinfection

Workplaces need to **clean and disinfect** surfaces, both steps are essential. The first step is cleaning, which means wiping dirt and germs off a surface. You can use common household detergent products for cleaning, they are stocked at supermarkets. Cleaning alone does not kill germs.

The next step is to disinfect the surface. Disinfection means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. Again, supermarkets stock common household disinfection products – it is important to use products that are labelled “disinfectant” and to follow the instructions on the label.

High touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, at least twice daily. More information can be found at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cleaning-and-disinfecting-reduce-covid-19-transmission>.

### Staff education and training

Workplaces should consider the staff education and training needs of their workers to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). This may include:

* emphasis on not attending work if unwell
* awareness pf physical distancing expectations and strategies to achieve them, including any specific work practice changes
* hand and cough hygiene
* use of new technologies and systems that enable working from home.

## Measures to help prepare for a case or outbreak

### Readiness to respond

In the event of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) associated with a workplace, the following should be considered in advance in order to be ready to respond:

* Having good record keeping on what shifts staff have worked and in which physical locations, such as building floors, as well as their up-to-date contact details. This will help support the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with contact tracing if needed
* If required, how the workplace will close and cease operations for a period of time while there is an investigation underway and/or to assist with transmission reduction
* How to undertake additional cleaning and disinfection that may be required if an individual with coronavirus (COVID-19) was infectious while at the site. In this event, advice will be provided by DHHS to support this.

### **Preparing a business continuity plan**

Organisations should ensure they have a business continuity plan in place that addresses the potential impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on their operations. Modifications to an existing business continuity plan, should consider any specific decisions or arrangements associated with its implementation in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19). Although management of a coronavirus (COVID-19) case in a workplace will involve engagement with DHHS, each workplace should have a plan in place in anticipation of this occurring to ensure there is a procedure that can be referred to in the event there is a need to close the workplace, to support contact tracing, to facilitate deep cleaning, and to enable re-opening after a closure period - as advised by DHHS.

At a minimum, business continuity plans should address the impacts of physical distancing measures, including:

* remote working
* closures
* ceasing non-essential work practices that compromise physical distancing
* changing the way in which the workplace interacts with clients/customers
* potential staff absenteeism due to a confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) case, or staff quarantining or self-isolating
* the impact of losing access to critical services, systems or suppliers that may become unavailable due to a confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) case or cases.

The business continuity plan should identify:

* risks associated with staff absenteeism, including the temporary loss of specialist skill sets
* dependencies such as use of third-party providers and service level agreements, including consumables and increased cleaning requirements
* the processes or tasks that if interrupted could lead to serious impacts (financial, stock, health, reputational, legal, or other)
* how essential service delivery will be maintained in the event of potential staff absenteeism
* how, and under what circumstances, the business will communicate with funders, external stakeholders, suppliers and clients/customers
* key roles and responsibilities to support plan maintenance and implementation.

# What to expect if a case of coronavirus (COVID-19) is confirmed at your workplace

## Notification of a confirmed case

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) receives all notifications of confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following notification, contact tracing is undertaken to understand where the person may have acquired their infection and where they have been while they were infectious. DHHS will notify employers when an employee has been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) and has been infectious while in a workplace setting. DHHS will provide guidance on any public health actions required. DHHS does not routinely notify employers of cases if there has been no assessed risk to the workplace, for example when someone has not attended the workplace while infectious.

## Management of a confirmed case or outbreak at your workplace

If the person with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) is deemed to have attended work while infectious, or could possibly have acquired coronavirus at work, the following steps should be undertaken::

1. Determine what areas of the workplace were visited or used by the confirmed case by referring to records of staff attendance at the workplace. The more accurate these details are and the more readily available, the more confident DHHS can be about which areas of the workplace need to be closed and for how long.
2. Consult with DHHS on whether the workplace or part of the workplace is required to close for a short period to facilitate cleaning and enable contact tracing. DHHS will determine whether to assign an outbreak management team and deploy DHHS staff to attend the workplace to perform a risk assessment and provide advice.
3. Work with DHHS to provide details that will assist in contact tracing such as records of staff attendance and up-to-date contact details for staff should they be required. DHHS will contact anyone who is identified as a close contact of the case. In some circumstances, DHHS will ask the company to make first contact with relevant staff members with agreed messages.
4. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation and close off the affected area before commencing cleaning and disinfection.
5. Organise for the cleaning and disinfecting of all areas that were used by the confirmed case. The workplace or part of the workplace as determined by DHHS should remain closed until this is completed.
6. Wider cleaning and disinfection of the site, paying particular attention to high-touch areas as may be advised by DHHS.
7. Any staff member who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) should remain at home in self-isolation until they have been notified by DHHS that they have met the criteria for release. The staff member should follow DHHS guidance and their employer’s policy with regards to return to work.
8. Ensure staff who are identified to be close contacts of a person with coronavirus (COVID-19) by DHHS do not come to work for 14 days after their last close contact with the positive case, as they must self-quarantine for this period. During self-quarantine, the staff member should watch for symptoms and seek medical assessment and testing if they develop symptoms such as fever, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath or a loss of their sense of taste or smell.
9. If the case or cases are deemed an outbreak, DHHS will maintain active involvement throughout the course of the outbreak including providing advice on when the workplace can re-open or when the outbreak is considered resolved.
10. The workplace should work with DHHS to ensure that all appropriate preventative measures have been taken prior to reopening the business.
11. Following a coronavirus (COVID-19) case at a workplace, risk management controls and infection prevention measures should be reviewed in order to reduce risk of further coronavirus (COVID-19) exposures.

## Roles of employers and Worksafe Victoria

### Role of the employer

Employers have specific duties to their employees but also those who visit the workplace including customers, patrons and visitors.

Under ‘The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004’ (OHS Act), where a risk to health is identified at a workplace, employers must eliminate the risk so far as is reasonably practicable and when elimination is not possible, reduce the risk so far as reasonably practicable. <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-alerts/exposure-coronavirus-workplaces>

Employers have a duty to eliminate or reduce risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) exposure for those who work on or attend the workplace. Employers should ensure:

* the workplace is cleaned regularly and thoroughly
* that staff are required to practice physical distancing
* the layout of the workplace promotes physical distancing where possible
* staff are required to practice good hand hygiene (and that hand washing facilities are well stocked and in good functioning order)
* ensure staff who are identified to be close contacts of a person with coronavirus (COVID-19) by DHHS do not attend work until told by DHHS that their quarantine period has ended
* staff are required to stay home when unwell, particularly if they are awaiting a coronavirus (COVID-19) test result or have been confirmed to have coronavirus (COVID-19)
* visitors to the workplace who are not staff and not essential to its functioning are limited
* the number of people on site at a workplace at any given time is limited
* staff are provided with clear information and appropriate training and instruction on measures that will reduce their risk of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19) which could include hand washing, how to clean and disinfect surfaces, and when to stay at home.
* employees know what to do if they feel unwell or suspect they've been infected, according to the information provided by DHHS (<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>)

Industry bodies, government and specific workplaces may seek further consultation via the Victorian Occupational and Environmental Physician COVID-19 Expert Panel. The panel provides specialist knowledge and guidance on a consulting basis to government, industry bodies and specific workplaces about minimising the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) to workers and members of the public (<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-occupational-and-environmental-physician-covid-19-expert-panel>)

### Role of employees

Note that under ‘The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004’ (OHS Act), employees also have duties including:

* Take reasonable care for their own health and safety
* Take reasonable care for the health and safety of persons who may be affected by the employee's acts or omissions at a workplace
* Co-operate with their employer with respect to any action taken by the employer to comply with a requirement imposed by or under the OHS Act.

Staff who are identified to be close contacts of a person with coronavirus (COVID-19) by DHHS must stay home and not attend work until told by DHHS that their quarantine period has ended.

If an employee develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) they should isolate themselves immediately, call the coronavirus information line on 1800 675 398 and follow the self-isolation guidance available on DHHS website.

Staff must be directed to stay home if they are sick or go home immediately if they become unwell. Any staff member showing coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, however mild, must be asked not to come into work or attend any worksite and be asked to leave immediately if they attend while unwell.

The employee should tell their employer as soon as possible if they are a positive case or a close contact of a positive case, follow the procedures their workplace has in place, and update their employer if their situation changes, for example, if they receive a positive coronavirus result.

### Role of WorkSafe

In Victoria, duty holders or persons conducting a business or undertaking must notify WorkSafe Victoria when they become aware of a case of coronavirus (COVID-19) where it is the cause (or one of the suspected causes) of a deathat a workplace.

Incident notification procedures are detailed on the [WorkSafe Victoria website](file:///C%3A/Users/sw2695/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/GVTMB8M3/WorkSafe%20Victoria%20website).

Notification must be made regardless of whether the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services is already aware of the case.

Worksafe Victoria *may* also become involved if otherwise consulted or if the workplace notifies them that there has been a coronavirus (COVID-19) diagnosis in the workplace.

### Further useful information for workplaces is available here:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/preventing-infection-workplace-covid-19>

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/planning-and-responding-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support>

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>