

In-home services: Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19

Who is this fact sheet for?

This factsheet is intended for employers, contractors and sole traders who provide in home services (excluding personal care, aged care and disability services). This includes, but is not limited to:

- > Child minding
- > Domestic cleaning
- > Garden and home maintenance
- > Dog walking and minding
- > Trades who enter a client's home

An employer's duty of care

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require all employers to take care of the health and safety of their workers and others (e.g. clients and residents of the home) at the workplace. These laws apply even when the workplace is a private home or dwelling.

If you work for yourself, you are your own worker.

Employers must identify risks at the workplace, and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks.

If your business has been determined an essential service by government and you are permitted to continue operating, you must ensure any risks to your workers are eliminated or minimised as much as is reasonably practicable.

Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

The client's home is a workplace when your worker is there to perform work. You should talk to the client to ensure they understand the risks of COVID-19 and about the control measures you have implemented to minimise the risk of exposing them and your worker to the virus.

You should also inform the client that as an 'other person' in the workplace they have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and ensure that their actions or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others.

Ensure residents of the house are in good health

Before a worker enters a home, you should request the client to inform you as to whether any resident of the house has:

- > been diagnosed with COVID-19
- > been suspected of having the COVID-19 virus or is awaiting results of whether they have the COVID-19 virus
- > been in contact with anyone who is suspected or is confirmed as having COVID-19 or is awaiting results
- > travelled overseas recently
- > had symptoms linked to COVID-19 such as fever, cough or shortness of breath.

Workers should not enter a client's home if this is the case.

Physical distancing

One of the most effective ways to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus is to limit physical proximity between workers and others. To encourage physical distancing – keeping everyone at least 1.5 metres physically apart – you can:

- > request clients to stay away from the area where workers are performing work. For example residents of the house may stay in one area whilst a cleaner performs their work. Then the cleaner and residents rotate so the cleaner can perform work in the other area.
- > if residents of the house must be in the same area as your worker, calculate the area where your worker is and set an upper limit on the number of people who may be in that area at any one time in order to keep the minimum 1.5 metres apart as much as possible.
- > aim to interact with the client outside. For example, a tradesperson consulting with a client about replacing their guttering does not have to enter the house and should avoid doing so.
- > If your worker is dog walking, ask the client to place the dog in a confined area or be tied up outside so your worker can collect them without interacting with the client.
- > request contactless payment if possible, over cash.

If physical distancing measures introduce new health and safety risks (e.g. because they impact communication), you need to manage those risks too.

Child minding services

At this moment, the role of children in the transmission of the COVID-19 virus is unclear, however children are not immune from the virus and have previously been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Whilst not all child-minding tasks can be carried out at a distance of at least 1.5 metres apart, consider what tasks can be altered to maximise physical distance from the child and whether the risk of exposure to the virus to your worker is sufficiently high that they should not continue to perform certain tasks during the pandemic.

If your worker must be in close contact with the child, aim for this time to be minimised as much as possible. Employers should also consider whether personal protective equipment (e.g gloves)

would be appropriate. Workers should be trained in how to use and properly dispose of this equipment.

Hygiene

Environmental cleaning

The amount of time the COVID-19 virus survives on objects and surfaces will vary. Environmental cleaning is one way to remove the virus that causes COVID-19.

As the workplace is the client's home, you should assure yourself that the client is maintaining a clean and hygienic environment before your worker enters the home. You should ask them if they have cleaned and disinfected (and when):

- > surfaces such as doors, handrails and other horizontal surfaces where your worker may be looking after children or providing other services
- > any equipment your worker will use e.g. vacuum, dog lead, change table
- > discarding or cleaning and disinfecting any items that have bodily fluids on them that your worker may come into contact with. For example teacups, tissues or children's toys
- > washroom facilities, and also that they have adequate supply of soap, water and toilet paper.

You should also discuss and agree with your client how your worker will clean up after they have performed their tasks. For example, it may be appropriate for your worker to disinfect where they have been in the home.

It might be helpful to provide information to the client to assist them to carry out these tasks effectively.

- > See the Department of Health information sheet on [environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19](#) for further information.
- > The Queensland Department of Health has information specifically for households on routine cleaning <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/industry/resources-and-fact-sheets-for-industry/routine-household-cleaning>

Employers should also:

- > provide a worker with alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- > provide a worker with their own equipment (instead of requiring them to use the client's)
- > require a worker not to touch items that may have bodily substances on them, for example used tissues
- > require a worker to clean and disinfect all equipment before using in another client's house
- > consider whether gloves should be worn when performing certain tasks.

If your worker is a cleaner, they should already be implementing control measures to minimise the spread of germs whilst cleaning. Review these control measures to determine whether they need to be altered to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19. This may include:

- > changing the type of product used to clean with. If introducing new cleaning products, ensure workers have been trained to ensure their safe handling
- > using disposable cleaning equipment where possible, or if using cloths, washing them after one use

- > requiring a worker to wear gloves

Worker and Client hygiene

Workers and residents in the home should be required to practice [good hygiene](#) whilst your worker is in the client's home including:

- > frequent hand washing. This involves cleaning hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- > washing body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day
- > limiting contact with others, including through shaking hands
- > covering their nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or a flexed elbow. Put tissues in the bin.
- > avoiding touching their mouth, eyes, and nose with unwashed (or gloved) hands.

Workers should stay at home if they are sick and seek medical advice if they have a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath (call their doctor or [healthdirect](#) on [1800 022 222](#)).

Consultation and communicating with workers

You must consult with your workers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. Allow workers to express views before you make any decisions. Even if your workers are spread over a number of different workplaces, you must find a way to keep in touch to talk to them about the risk of exposure to the virus and to emphasise the importance of [good hygiene](#).

The Australian Government Department of Health has a range [of posters and other resources](#) aimed at educating the public about COVID-19.

Workers are most likely to know about the risks of their work. Involving them will help build commitment to this process and any changes.

The [model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#) can provide more information about your duties to consult.

You need to communicate clearly with workers about control measures. Provide clear direction and guidance about what is expected of workers. Workers should know:

- > when to stay away from the workplace
- > what action to take if they become unwell
- > what symptoms to be concerned about.

Remind workers they have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and to not adversely affect the health and safety of others.

Provide workers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns, and access to support services, including employee assistance programs.

What else can I do?

- > Keep your knowledge of the COVID-19 situation up-to-date. Follow advice from authoritative sources such as the Australian Government Department of Health and check daily for any updates to safety advice.



Coronavirus COVID-19

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- > Understand your business and its WHS hazards and risks.
- > Make sure the workplace and workers are properly resourced to manage WHS risks during the COVID-19 outbreak and check that the resources are being used.
- > Review your policies, procedures and reporting process to ensure they remain current for any incidents, hazards and other WHS issues that arise during this time. Update these materials if necessary.
- > Ensure all policies are communicated clearly and processes are being followed.

Further information

- > For general advice for employers on managing risks to exposure to the COVID-19 virus see <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-employers>
- > For further information on risk management, see the model [Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#).
- > For limits on public gatherings and definitions of essential activities see: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/limits-on-public-gatherings-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

Other resources

- > [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- > [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
- > [Australian Tax Office – COVID-19: information for small business](#)
- > [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)