

# In-house 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, or have potentially been, exposed to a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is suspected to have COVID-19 (even if the person who is suspected to have COVID-19 has not yet been tested); travelled overseas recently; or
- > 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.

## **Health checks and quarantine**

Monitor your workers for key symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever.

- > Direct all workers (whether they are at the workplace or not) to report to you if:
  - > they are experiencing any symptoms
  - > they have been, or have potentially been, exposed to a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is suspected to have COVID-19 (even if the person who is suspected to have COVID-19 has not yet been tested), or
  - > they have undertaken, or are planning to undertake, any travel.
- > Encourage workers to report if they observe another worker is displaying any symptoms.
- > Stop workers working if they are displaying symptoms.
- > Stop workers who have contracted COVID-19 from returning to the workplace until they provide evidence they are clear of the virus.

## **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; and
- > washroom facilities, and also that they have adequate supply of soap, water and toilet paper.

Clients should also discard or clean and disinfect any items that have bodily fluids on them that your worker may come into contact with. For example tea cups, tissues or children's toys.

You should check that the client has closed bins for workers to hygienically dispose of waste and rubbish such as used tissues, immediately after use. Workers should use alcohol-based hand sanitiser after they dispose of their waste.

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.



# Coronavirus COVID-19

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- > 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 including personal items such as glasses and phones before using in another client's house; and
- > 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; and
- > 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](tel:1800022222)).

See the Department of Health information sheet on [environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19](#) for further information.

## **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](#).





# Coronavirus COVID-19

Updated: 9 April 2020

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.

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

SWA materials

- > [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- > [Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks.](#)
- > For general advice for employers on managing risks to exposure to the COVID-19 virus, go to [COVID-19 Information for workplaces](#)

Other useful resources

- > Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
- > [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)

Support resources







# Coronavirus COVID-19

Updated: 9 April 2020

- > [Business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au) – Support for businesses
- > [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- > [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
- > [Australian Tax Office – COVID-19](#)
- > Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
- > [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)

## Support services

- > [Heads Up – Healthy workplaces support](#)
- > [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)
- > [Lifeline](#)

\*Please note. To ensure this webpage is accessible and easy to understand, it talks about employer responsibilities. Under the [model WHS laws](#), duties apply to a broader range of people than just employers. Any person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) is covered by the [model WHS laws](#).

For more information see the [Interpretive Guideline – model Work Health and Safety Act – the meaning of ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’](#).