Public Transport: Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require employers* to take care of the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes:

> providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety;

> adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work.

As an employer, you must identify risks at the workplace, and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks.

Public transport workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19

The enclosed spaces and limited ventilation of public transport increases the risk of workers and passengers being exposed to the COVID-19 virus because of the potential for close contact between people. In these circumstances the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus cannot be completely eliminated due to difficulty in achieving physical distancing of 1.5m between people. However, employers must do all that they can to minimise that risk so far as is reasonably practicable.

Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Physical distancing

Physical distancing – keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart – is one way to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus between passengers and workers. Practical measures to encourage physical distancing include:

> limiting passenger capacity in buses, ferries, trams and trains. This can be achieved by:
  o calculating the safe number of travellers per vehicle and the positions in which they should sit in that vehicle to achieve 1.5 metres distance apart; and

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- the driver frequently reminding passengers to sit 1.5 metres apart, or at least as far apart as possible if this distance is not achievable.

  - providing extra services during peak times or where data indicates there is a high level of patronage.

> allocating pre-booked seats to maximise physical distancing – at least 1.5 metres apart where possible.

> allowing customers to only touch the card reader furthest from the driver

> blocking off the first row of seats on buses or areas immediately around workers on other forms of public transport.

> encouraging passengers to physical distance themselves by keeping at least 1.5 metres from each other on platforms, when using escalators and lifts and when queuing to board.

> asking passengers on the platform or station to stand well back until all passengers have disembarked.

> creating floor markings that provide minimum guide distances between passengers.

> encouraging passengers to travel outside of peak times.

> altering the way passengers enter and exit the vehicle. For example:

  - requiring passengers to board only through the rear door to minimise exposure to the driver (unless the customer requires assistance); or

  - requiring passengers to enter and exit through separate doors.

> re-considering the need for ticket inspectors or reducing the number of locations they visit during this time.

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

The Australian Government Department of Health has a range of posters and other resources aimed at educating the public about COVID-19. These posters can be placed in client-facing work environments (e.g. workplace entrances, buses, platforms).

Health checks and quarantine

The health of your workers should be checked 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. Prohibit workers working if they are displaying symptoms or have contracted COVID-19 until they provide evidence they are clear of the virus.

Hygiene

Environmental cleaning

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

Usual cleaning regimes should be increased.

> Frequently touched surfaces, including handrails and doors, should be cleaned and disinfected frequently using appropriate detergent or disinfectant solutions.

> Personal items used in the workplace such as glasses and phones should be cleansed and disinfected frequently (e.g by using isopropyl alcohol wipes)

> Workplace amenities including kitchens, lunch rooms, common areas, change rooms, toilets, showers, drink fountains and vending machines, should be cleaned industrially and the frequency of this cleaning should increase.

Workers should continue to use standard cleaning practices at the end of each shift, as part of good hygiene practice.

In the event of a passenger spreading droplets (such as sneezing, coughing or vomiting), workers should clean surfaces with appropriate disinfectant wipes so that the potential spread of infection can be minimised.

Drivers and other customer service staff should be equipped and trained in the ability to remove waste safely and disinfect surfaces during their shift. To minimise the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus the person cleaning should wear gloves and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves. Gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be made available throughout the workplace.

The workplace, should provide closed bins in appropriate locations for workers and passengers to hygienically dispose of waste and rubbish such as used tissues as soon as possible after use. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be available for workers to use after they dispose of their waste.

Workplaces should consider limiting or reducing recirculated air-conditioning in common areas.

See the Department of Health information sheet on environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19 for further information on cleaning.

Worker and passenger hygiene

Workers should be required to practice good hygiene, including:

> covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue

> immediately disposing of tissues properly

> washing hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet

> using alcohol-based hand sanitisers

> cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and shared equipment after use

> limiting contact with others, including through shaking hands or touching a passenger's payment card

> washing body hair and clothes thoroughly every day

> staying more than 1.5 metres away from others, and

> reporting and staying home if experiencing any symptoms.

In addition, to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, workers should also:

> avoid touching their face

> avoid handshakes or any other close physical contact and

> put cigarette butts in the bin.

Washroom facilities for passengers and workers should have adequate facilities for good hygiene such as adequate supply of soap, water, paper hand towels or hand drying machines and toilet paper. These must be kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order.

Workers and passengers at high volume stations and platforms should also have access to hand sanitiser.

Employers should also consider reducing the number of touch points for passengers and workers. For example, leaving access doors open where appropriate.

> *Do drivers and customer service staff require face shields, masks or other personal protective equipment?*

Practising good hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. Workers should:

> wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet

> cover coughs and sneezes, dispose of tissues and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and

> if unwell, avoid contact with others and practice physical distancing by staying more than 1.5 metres away from people.

The following control measures are more effective than PPE. For example:

> installing screens where possible for drivers;

> encouraging customer service staff to stay behind information booths or desks or where not available, to maintain a sufficient distance from passengers; and

> requiring passengers to use a payment card, prepaid ticket, or other eligible pass in order to limit the use of money handling by drivers and ticket sales people. Where workers must handle money or eftPOS machines, provide them with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

PPE such as gloves and masks can then be put in place to supplement the above controls.

Further information about PPE including additional employer obligations can be found on the PPE page of our website.

Keep workers and passengers informed

Employers should inform all workers about the risks of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Where required workers should be trained regarding the controls outlined earlier in this fact sheet.

Passengers should also be informed about the risk of exposure and good hygiene through increased signage and information. The Australian Government Department of Health has a range of posters and other resources aimed at educating the public about COVID-19. These posters can be placed around platforms and in trains and buses.

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. It may not be possible because of the work you do to facilitate all workers to work from home, but there are many steps you can take to minimise the risks in an office environment.

> Make sure your premises 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 that these are communicated clearly and processes are being followed.

> Consult with workers and ensure there is a means for them to raise any concerns about the steps you are taking to manage the risks.

Further information and resources

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

Australia Government Department of Health Fact Sheet – Information for public transport (taxis, ride-hail services, trains, buses, trams etc)
Australian Government Coronavirus app (Apple App Store, Google Play)
World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces

Support resources

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

Support services

Heads Up – Healthy workplaces support
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman
http://www.lifeline.org.au

*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'.