Taxi and ride share: 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

- making sure taxi and ride share activities don't expose anyone to health and safety risks. That includes drivers and passengers

- providing adequate and accessible facilities for the welfare of workers in carrying out their work, and

- monitoring the health of workers and the conditions of the workplace for the purpose of preventing illness or injury.

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

Taxi and ride share workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19

Passenger transport remains an essential service. It allows essential workers to get to and from their workplaces, as well as enabling other persons to access vital services such as health providers, pharmacies and supermarkets.

The nature of taxi and ride share services means that drivers are limited in their ability to maintain recommended physical distancing (at least 1.5 metres physically apart) from passengers, increasing the risks of them and their passengers being exposed to COVID-19. Drivers and providers should do everything that is reasonably practicable to reduce the risks of their exposure and exposure of passengers.

Providers, drivers and passengers should implement control measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that other measures to address well known work health and safety risks continue to be implemented.

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Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Physical distancing

Physical distancing– keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart – in taxis, ride share vehicles and other passenger transport vehicles will be challenging, but there are steps that can be taken to maximise physical distancing to the extent possible, to help minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Providers should consider whether their transport services can be adjusted to increase separation of travellers and avoid queuing.

Each driver is responsible for making sure physical distancing is observed to the extent possible in their vehicles. Where possible, drivers should ask passengers to:

> sit in the back seat of the vehicle
> handle their own luggage
> use contactless payments - where cash payment is required, drivers and passengers should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser afterwards.

Drivers should avoid handshakes or any other close physical contact with passengers.

While waiting at taxi stands, drivers should avoid physical contact and maintain more than 1.5 metres distance from other drivers when not in their vehicles.

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

You should put processes in place to regularly monitor and review the implementation of physical distancing measures to ensure they remain effective.

Hygiene

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

Passenger transport inevitably entails the regular touching of objects and surfaces on vehicles by drivers and many passengers over the course of a shift. This means that usual cleaning of vehicles needs to be increased.

Drivers should:

> have alcohol-based hand sanitiser for their own use and available for use by their passengers, and regularly use it after opening and closing doors, moving luggage, exchanging payment and after personal contact
> provide closed bins in vehicles where appropriate to enable the hygienic disposal of waste and rubbish such as used tissues, immediately after use. Drivers and passengers should use alcohol-based hand sanitiser after they dispose of their waste

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> clean and disinfect personal items such as glasses and phones frequently (e.g. using isopropyl alcohol wipes)
> clean surfaces with appropriate disinfectant wipes if a passenger spreads droplets (such as sneezing, coughing or vomiting), and
> employ standard cleaning practices at the end of each shift, as part of good hygiene practice by using appropriate detergent solutions. Once cleaned, they should ideally be disinfected using appropriate disinfectant solutions, including a focus on high touch point surfaces such as door handles and internal handles, seats and seatbelts, window controls, payment terminals and boot lids.

To minimise the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, the person cleaning should wear gloves and wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves.

If the increased availability of hand sanitiser introduces new health and safety risks (e.g. accidental ingestion by children), you need to identify and manage those risks too.

The following resources provide additional tips for cleaning vehicles:

> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria Fact Sheet – Vehicle cleaning tips for drivers
> NSW Point to Point Transport Commissioner Video – How to clean your point to point vehicle
> Australia Government Department of Health Fact Sheet – Environmental cleaning and disinfection principles for COVID-19
> Safe Work Australia's Cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 fact sheet.

Driver hygiene

Drivers should immediately cease providing services if they are:

> feeling unwell or displaying symptoms of COVID-19
> have been tested for COVID-19 and awaiting results
> are required by health authorities to self-isolate.

During shifts, drivers should practice good hygiene. Drivers must wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand washing should be done before and after eating and after going to the toilet. Other hygiene measures should include:

> covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
> immediately disposing of tissues properly
> using alcohol-based hand sanitisers with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient
> cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and shared equipment
> washing body hair and clothes thoroughly every day, and
> staying more than 1.5 metres away from others.

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

> avoid touching their face
> avoid handshakes or any other close physical contact with passengers
> washing body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day

> refrain from spitting at all times, and
> put cigarette butts in the bin.

You should put processes in place to regularly monitor and review the implementation of hygiene measures to ensure they remain effective.

Information for passengers

Drivers should consider displaying signage and guidance in their vehicles for passengers on actions that they can take to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

> The Australian Government Department of Health has a range of posters and other resources aimed at educating the public about COVID-19.
> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria also has a poster for passengers travelling in commercial passenger vehicles.

Passengers should practice good hygiene before, during and after travelling in a taxi or ride share service vehicle, including:

> covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
> disposing of tissues properly
> washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet
> washing body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day
> using alcohol-based hand sanitisers
> staying home if sick.

Passengers who are unwell or travelling to self-isolation location

Wherever possible, unwell passengers or passengers travelling to their location of mandatory self-isolation should use a personal mode of transport to minimise exposure to others.

If unwell passengers or passengers travelling to their location of mandatory self-isolation do need to use a taxi or ride share service, then the passenger should avoid contact with others including the driver to the extent possible. This includes:

> wearing a surgical mask, if available
> avoiding direct contact with the driver, including sitting in the back seat to achieve as much separation as is reasonably possible and maintain
> practise good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze hygiene:
>   > wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
>   > cover cough and sneeze with a tissue or cough/sneeze into elbow or upper arm, dispose of tissues after use, and
>   > use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser to regularly clean hands.

If the driver believes a passenger has not taken the above precautions and cannot provide a safe service, then the driver may choose to refuse or terminate the trip.

It is never ok for drivers to refuse or cancel a trip based on a passenger's nationality, disability or cultural background. There are equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws that apply to fare refusal.

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Providers should consult and communicate with drivers

As a taxi or ride share service provider, you must consult with your drivers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. This means you must consult when:

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

If you and the drivers have agreed to procedures for consultation, the consultation must be in accordance with those procedures.

You must allow drivers to express their views and raise work health and safety issues that may arise directly or indirectly because of COVID-19. You must take the views of drivers into account when making decisions and advise drivers of your decision. Drivers are most likely to know about the risks of their work. Involving them will help build commitment to this process and any changes.

Consultation does not require consensus or agreement, but you must allow your drivers to be part of the decision making process for COVID-19 related matters.

If drivers are represented by Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) you must include then in the consultation process.

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 drivers about control measures. Provide clear direction and guidance about what is expected of drivers.

Drivers must know:

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

Remind drivers 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 drivers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns, and access to support services, including employee assistance programs. A list of support services to help workers is provided below.

Interstate workers

Some states and territories have largely closed their borders, requiring people arriving from interstate to self-quarantine for at least 14 days. However, there are some exemptions, including for taxis and ride share.

You should stay up to date on the latest travel restrictions and requirements from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

How can I meet my officer duty during the COVID-19 outbreak?

> 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.
> Ensure you understand your business and its WHS hazards and risks. Risk assessments are a useful tool to help identify WHS hazards and risks, as well as strategies to help manage them. Where you have risk assessments in place, they may need to be reviewed to ensure they are up to date. 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 the work 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 is available on who is an officer in the workplace and their health and safety duty.

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Further information and Resources

> [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
> [Model 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](#)
> For general advice on cleaning, go to the [Cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#) fact sheet

> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria Fact Sheet – [Vehicle cleaning tips for drivers](#)
> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria poster for passengers [travelling in commercial passenger vehicles](#)
> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria – [Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for CPV passengers and drivers](#)
> NSW Point to Point Transport Commissioner Video – [How to clean your point to point vehicle](#)
> NSW Point to Point Transport Commissioner fact sheet – [Coronavirus (COVID-19) fact sheet for the point to point transport industry](#)
> Australia Government Department of Health Fact Sheet – [Information for public transport (taxis, ride-hail services, trains, buses, trams etc)](#)

Support resources

> Information from the Australian Government is available at [Australia.gov.au](#).
> Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
> [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
> [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
> [Australian Taxation Office – COVID-19: information for small business](#)
> [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)

Other support services

> [Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#)
> [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)
> [Heads Up – Healthy workplaces support](#)
> [Lifeline](#)