Warehousing and logistics: 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; and

> 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.

Warehousing and logistics workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19

Warehousing and logistics workers are essential in keeping Australian supply chains operational. Due to the nature of the work, many workers cannot work from home and must continue to interact with workers and other persons in their workplace.

Workers and other persons in close proximity to one another increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. You must do everything reasonably practicable to keep these workers a physical distance of at least 1.5 metres.

You must 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. This is the case even if implementing control measures result in delays or disruption to your work.

swa.gov.au/coronavirus

safe work australia

Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Physical distancing

Physical distancing – keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart – will be challenging in some warehouses and logistics activities, but it is a key measure to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

> Limit physical interactions between workers and other persons.
>> Workers who can work from home (e.g. office staff) should work from home.
>> Review tasks and processes that usually require close interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between workers where practical and safe to do so.
>> Postpone non-essential gatherings or training.
>> For essential gatherings, conduct in spaces that enable workers to keep the required physical distance of at least 1.5 metres, ideally outdoor spaces.
>> Split workers' shifts to reduce the number of workers onsite at any given time.
>> Allow additional time between shifts to limit staff interaction and enable time for cleaning.
>> Use methods such as mobile phone or radio to communicate.
>> Reduce the number of workers utilising common areas at a given time (e.g by staggering meal breaks and start times and encouraging workers to eat and take breaks outside where possible).
>> Spread out furniture in common areas.
>> Put policies in place to eliminate close contact between delivery workers, customers and warehouse and logistics (e.g. contactless collections and deliveries, using email or photographs instead of requiring signatures for acceptance of collections and delivery)
>> Eliminate or limit visitors to warehouses. Conduct meetings by photo or video conference where required.
> Limit worker numbers.
>> Reduce the number of tasks to be completed each day.
>> Postpone non-essential work.
> Place signage about physical distancing around the workplace.
> Consider if plant can be used to reduce the number of workers interacting.

Nominate responsible persons to make sure your workers are following the rules for physical distancing.

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, loading areas).

swa.gov.au/coronavirus

safe work australia

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.
> Prohibit workers who have contracted COVID-19 from returning to the workplace until they provide evidence they are clear of the virus.

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.

Usual cleaning schedules will need to be increased.

> Frequently touched surfaces (such as handrails, scanners, plant controls and doors) should be cleaned frequently using appropriate detergent or disinfectant solutions.
> Workplace amenities including kitchens, lunch rooms, common areas, change rooms, toilets, drink fountains and vending machines, should be cleaned industrially and the frequency of this cleaning should increase.

Also consider reducing the number of touch points for workers. For example, leaving access doors open, where appropriate.

Workers should be provided with cleaning agents and trained to clean down plant or equipment (e.g. forklifts or trolleys) immediately after use.

Gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be made available throughout the workplace. If possible, make hand sanitiser available at entry and exit points so workers can use it when arriving and leaving.

To minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19, the people cleaning should wear gloves and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves.

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

Worker hygiene

Workers should be required to practice good hygiene. This includes:

> covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
> immediately 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
> using alcohol-based hand sanitisers
> cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and shared equipment after use
> washing body, hair (including facial 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 COVID-19, workers should also:

> avoid touching their face
> avoid handshakes or any other close physical contact
> refrain from spitting at all times, and
> put cigarette butts in the bin.

Washroom facilities should have adequate supplies for good hygiene, such as adequate supply of soap, water and toilet paper. Washroom facilities must be kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order. Workplaces should also be well stocked with alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

To enhance worker hygiene standards, you should also:

> adequately delineate between work and common areas. This could include reminding workers (with posters or through training) to their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or sanitise their hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before entering and exiting a common area.
> inform workers of workplace etiquette and standards that are expected when utilising these common areas (cleaning up after yourself, placing rubbish in bins provided, avoiding putting items such as phones on meal surfaces etc.)

Deliveries and contractors attending the workplace

Non-essential visits to the workplace should be cancelled or postponed.

Deliveries and other contractors who need to attend the workplace should be given clear instructions of your requirements while they are on site.

Minimise the number of workers attending to deliveries and contractors as much as possible. Make alcohol-based hand sanitiser available for workers after physically handling deliveries.

Direct visiting truck drivers to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods such as mobile phones to communicate with your workers wherever possible.

Use, and ask deliveries and contractors to use, electronic paper work where possible, to minimise physical interaction. Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. For instance, see whether a confirmation email or a photo of the loaded or unloaded goods can be accepted as proof of delivery or collection (as applicable).

Keep workers informed

You should provide all workers information about the risks of exposure to COVID-19. Where required, workers should be trained in infection control.

swa.gov.au/coronavirus

safe work australia

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

Consultation and communicating with workers

You must consult with workers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. Allow workers to express views before you make decisions.

You must also consult with other duty holders working on site.

Workers are most likely to know about the risks of their work. Involving them will help build worker commitment to this process and any changes and may also provide greater insight into what control measures may be most effective.

The model Code of Practice: *Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination* can give you more information about your duties to consult.

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. Additional support may be necessary for workers in higher risk categories.

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 road freight.

You should stay up to date on the latest travel restrictions and entry requirements from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and provide that information to your workers.

Further information and resources

SWA materials

> Model Code of Practice: *Managing the work environment and facilities*

Other useful resources

> 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'.](#)