

Working from home



PCBU information sheet

This information sheet provides practical guidance for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) on managing work health and safety (WHS) risks when workers are doing computer-based work from home.

What is working from home?

Working from home means workers work from their own home, alone or with other household members present.

Arrangements may be ongoing, temporary or ad hoc, and for all or part of a worker's hours. These arrangements may be put in place to suit the needs of the PCBU (e.g. downsizing offices), the worker (e.g. less commuting or more flexibility) or due to external factors (e.g. public health directions or severe weather events).

Working from home can have benefits for everyone involved, but as with any type of work, the WHS risks must be managed.

What do PCBUs need to do under WHS laws?

WHS laws apply to home workplaces just as they do to traditional workplaces such as offices.

You must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers while they are at work. This includes managing WHS risks when working from home.

Your WHS duties apply even if workers request to work from home or if they are working from home due to external factors.



Workers have a WHS duty at work to:

- take reasonable care for their own health and safety and to not adversely affect others health and safety
- comply with reasonable WHS instructions, as far as they are reasonably able, and
- cooperate with reasonable WHS policies or procedures that have been provided to them.

For example, providing accurate information to the PCBU, using and maintaining equipment as directed, and reporting changes that may affect their WHS (e.g. if their home is damaged in a natural disaster or is being renovated).

How to meet your WHS duty

A range of issues need to be considered before work is done from home and you may need to change how work is done (e.g. how you manage and organise the work, or what tasks are involved). Working from home may change WHS risks or create new ones. It may also impact how you meet your WHS duties (e.g. how you consult with workers, identify hazards or implement control measures).

Homes and living arrangements vary, and so do the risks. What you need to do to manage risks is also likely to vary.

Working from home may not always be practical or suit all types of work or workers. If you cannot meet your WHS duties, you must not require, or agree to, workers working from home.

Consulting workers

You must consult, so far as is reasonably practicable, with workers about WHS issues that may affect them. You must consult workers when identifying hazards and working out how to control risks, including how you will monitor workplace conditions. You must consult workers before starting work from home arrangements or making other changes.

Effective consultation is important because workers will often be the only person aware of the risks associated with their home working environment. You may also need their help to identify and assess the risks, and identify and implement control measures.

If workers are represented by a health and safety representative (HSR) you must include them in consultation arrangements on health and safety matters.

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Family and domestic violence

Where workers disclose that they are experiencing family and domestic violence, they will know the most about their personal circumstances and may have important information that should be considered before starting or changing working from home arrangements. More information on your duties to manage the risks of family and domestic violence in the workplace is available in the information sheet: [Family and domestic violence at the workplace](#).

It is important to ensure workers know how to report issues or concerns while working from home and that they feel safe to do so. You must not discriminate against workers (e.g. dismiss workers) for raising a WHS issue or concern.

More information is available in the Code of Practice: [Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#) and [Worker representation and participation guide](#).

Managing WHS risks when working from home

You must eliminate or minimise health and safety risks, so far as is reasonably practicable, including when workers are working from home. You can do this by using the four step risk management process. All these steps must be supported by consultation. See the Code of Practice: [How to manage work health and safety risks](#) for more information.

1. Identify hazards

Identify hazards to find out what could cause harm. Consider whether any previously identified hazards may change when working from home and any new hazards that may be present. Use a combination of methods to identify hazards such as:

- using surveys, tools and checklists (e.g. requiring workers to complete a WHS checklist or other approval process before starting, or changing, a working from home arrangement)
- encouraging workers to report any concerns and problems promptly and letting them know how to do so
- considering the work, tasks involved, resources required, and workers' skills and training
- observing any changes to workers' behaviour (e.g. at team meetings) or productivity
- monitoring the working environment (e.g. via checklists you ask workers to complete), and
- reviewing available information (e.g. incident records, complaints, timesheets, Health and Safety Committee meeting minutes, and leave, turnover or workers compensation data).

Depending on the potential WHS risks involved, you may need to engage the services of a health and safety professional to assess the WHS risks (e.g. to do a workstation assessment).



Common hazards workers may be exposed to when at work from home:

- poor workstation set up (e.g. poor lighting)
- poor working environment (e.g. noise, inadequate heating or cooling, poor electrical safety)
- sedentary work
- trip/slip hazards (e.g. children's toys or mess from home renovations)
- psychosocial hazards (e.g. high or low job demands, low job control, poor support, low role clarity or harmful behaviours such as online abuse)
- inadequate facilities (e.g. lack of ventilation or utility outages)
- fatigue (e.g. long hours, being 'always on')
- family and domestic violence
- working in remote areas

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2. Assess the risks

Assess the risks to understand what could happen if someone is exposed to the hazard and the likelihood of it happening. If you already know the risks and how to control them effectively, you can implement controls without undertaking a risk assessment and simply check they are effective.

3. Control the risks

You must eliminate the risks associated with working from home if it is reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risks, you must minimise the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. This can be done by using the most effective control measures, or combination of controls, that are reasonably practicable.

In some situations, managing the risks may mean **deciding not to allow workers to work from home** (e.g. not implementing, pausing, or ending a work from home arrangement). You must then **provide somewhere else safe for workers while at work** (e.g. the office or a safe alternative such as a coworking facility). This may be long term or just while control measures are being implemented.

Hybrid working arrangements can help manage some risks. For example, regular office days can be scheduled to do tasks that are best done face to face or in the office (e.g. collaborative tasks, performance discussions or work requiring specialised equipment).

Other control measures for hazards associated with working from home include:

- **work design:** designing and planning the work to ensure it is safe including the tasks (e.g. not assigning work that is unsafe to do at home), procedures (e.g. including supervisors on videoconferences with difficult clients and encouraging workers to end and report calls which become abusive), when work is done and timeframes (e.g. redistributing tasks to ensure appropriate job demands)
- **workstation set-up:** ensuring workstations are safely set-up and maintained, see the [Setting up your workstation infographic](#) for more information
- **equipment:** providing fit for purpose equipment (e.g. headsets for frequent calls, adjustable chairs, monitors to prevent prolonged laptop use) and ensuring it is safe (e.g. safety switches are used)
- **resources:** ensuring workers have access to sufficient resources to work from home safely (e.g. databases are accessible at home and there are enough workers to finish usual tasks on time)
- **communication:** regularly communicating with workers (e.g. schedule regular video catch ups and ensure information is available online as well as in the office) and ensuring workers can easily communicate with others (e.g. co-workers and clients)
- **work hours and breaks:** minimising after hours work (e.g. avoid meetings outside ordinary hours or put automatic replies on work phones or email accounts after hours, particularly if frequently dealing with external customers) and ensuring workers take regular breaks from sedentary work
- **supervision and support:** supervising workers (e.g. providing regular feedback, support and direction including through regular catch ups and team meetings), ensuring managers have sufficient time and availability to support workers, and setting clear expectations that workers should disengage from work at the end of the day
- **organisational justice:** developing unbiased, transparent policies and procedures and applying them fairly (e.g. ensure all workers can access training and development opportunities) and maintaining worker privacy (e.g. ensure managers are not overheard by other household members when having performance discussions)
- **emergency plans and first aid:** ensuring workers have access to first aid, a way to get help if needed (e.g. can access a phone) and know how to safely evacuate in an emergency, and
- **information and training to support control measures:** provide training and instruction on how to do tasks safely, how to raise health and safety issues or concerns, and how to implement control measures (e.g. train supervisors to implement workplace policies on preventing harmful behaviours).

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You may need workers' help to implement some control measures, particularly control measures that relate to their physical working from home environment. It is important this is supported by effective consultation with workers.

The WHS Regulations set out a range of specific requirements to manage certain risks (e.g. psychosocial risks and remote or isolated work) which must be complied with. For more information on managing specific hazards or risks in your workplace see the Safe Work Australia [website](#).

4. Review control measures

Maintain and regularly review your control measures to ensure they are effective, working as planned and do not introduce new uncontrolled risks. Including before a change that is likely to give create a new or different risk (e.g. before working arrangements change).

Reports, informal and formal complaints, grievances, injuries or other incidents may also identify new hazards or risks that are not controlled so far as is reasonably practicable.

If a control measure is not working effectively, it must be reviewed and modified or replaced.



Other legislative frameworks

WHS laws do not operate in isolation and other laws may also apply to work from home. For example, industrial relations, criminal, anti-discrimination, privacy and workers' compensation laws.

Workers' compensation is a form of insurance that supports workers if they are injured at, or because of, work. Generally, workers will be covered for workers' compensation while working from home if this arrangement is supported by the employer.