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Acknowledgment

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INTRODUCTION

The current COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is resulting in considerable social disruption within the community and to workplaces.

Potential for infection at work and changed workplace arrangements are presenting work health and safety (WHS) risks for employers and workers.

An employer’s duty of care under the WHS laws is to actively identify these risks and be prepared to implement control measures to remove or reduce them. The onset of a pandemic may happen quickly, so employers should develop their business continuity plan, addressing the anticipated business risks of a pandemic and ensure it addresses WHS issues.

This information explains how to do that, focussing on four key areas:

1. Preparedness
2. Response: Initial action
3. Response: Targeted action
4. Recovery.
Throughout this stage:

- **employers** should consult with workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs) and stay up to date with information/directions from [Coronavirus.tas.gov.au](https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au).

- **workers** must co-operate with their employer in implementing control measures, and take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure they don’t do anything that creates or increases a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others.

**Undertake WHS risk management**

Employers should, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs:

- identify workers and work activities at greatest risk of spreading infectious diseases in a pandemic. For example, workers in clinical roles or working in clinical settings, border control, face to face customer service

- assess the likelihood and consequence of infection to workers and others in the workplace

- identify suitable control measures to remove or reduce risks. You may need expert advice for this

- encourage ill workers to remain away from work while unwell

- develop an implementation plan.

**Develop a pandemic plan**

Employers must consider how they will manage the risk of workers presenting with symptoms at work or being directed to stay away from work due to quarantine or isolation.

Business may experience further disruptions and impacts due to travel restrictions, delays or disruptions to public transport, or increased fear and anxiety associated with the pandemic. Lack of planning can lead to a cascade of WHS failures when employers are unable to manage through the disruption of a pandemic.

Employers should develop a pandemic plan in consultation with:

- their workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs)


This will help prepare for the pandemic, especially if a declared outbreak of COVID-19 happens near their workplace.

The plan should cover:

- policy and procedures for managing workers, contractors, suppliers and customers who present with flu-like symptoms

- the impact of increased absenteeism or business disruption due to illness, travel or other restrictions

- the risks and challenges associated with business continuity if a significant number of workers, contractors and/or suppliers cannot come to the workplace due to illness, travel or other restrictions

In detail, the plan and its risk control measures may include:

- policy and procedures that require workers to report when they are ill or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, and when they should stay home

- reviewing and amending existing customer service/service delivery methods; for example closing service counters or installing infection control barriers
• allowing only identified, essential workers, contractors and suppliers to attend the workplace
• removing requirements for a medical certificate for workers who are ill with acute respiratory illness
• talking with labour hire companies used for contract or temporary workers about the importance of ill workers staying home
• using alternative work options including telephone and video conferencing, working from home, staggered work shifts
• maintaining social distancing between workers, contractors, suppliers and customers; discouraging handshaking, touching faces and other physical contact
• ensuring good workplace hygiene and cleaning practices are implemented between use of any shared workstations, vehicles, counters and so on
• ensuring a suitable supply of recommended personal protective equipment and cleaning products
• discontinuing non-essential meetings, events, all social gatherings and informal or spontaneous gatherings at work
• addressing workers’ concerns about pay, leave, safety, health, and other issues that may arise and providing them with appropriate, useful information
• addressing mental health and social consequences of COVID-19 and offering information and support, including counselling through an employee assistance program, a supportive workplace culture, or external service providers such as Lifeline or Beyond Blue.

The plan should also cover/include what to do if:

• a worker has been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
• a worker becomes ill at work; for example, limiting the number of people who have contact with the ill worker, providing the ill worker with a disposable surgical face mask to wear to reduce the risk of disease transmission, advising them to go home and immediately and call their doctor or the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738
• there is a suspected case of COVID-19 awaiting results. For example, advise the worker to remain self-isolated at home and strictly follow their doctor’s advice. If Public Health Services confirm the worker has COVID-19, it will communicate with any close contacts from the workplace to advise them on what action to take. Employers must notify the incident to WorkSafe Tasmania (see the section on ‘Response: Targeted action’ for information about notifying WorkSafe).

Work out:

• how to identify workers who may be at risk and how to support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into the workplace. This could include people who have recently travelled overseas, or workers with health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness
• what arrangements should be made to transport these workers to a doctor or to their home, preferably not using public transport
• what to do when a worker with suspected infection has left the workplace, including ensuring the worker’s workstation, work area and any communal areas they’ve been in are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible.
Resourcing

Small and medium-sized businesses without in-house staff health and welfare support could develop partnerships and plans with their local health and social service providers in advance of any emergency.

Larger businesses should appoint one or more pandemic disease managers (and backups) to direct the preparation activities and manage the implementation of risk control systems.

Working with contractors/other employers

In some workplaces, more than one business can have responsibility for the same WHS matters, for example: if they are sharing the same workplace (for example, on a construction site) or sharing the same workers (for example, engaging workers through a labour hire firm).

In situations like this, each business should communicate and share information to find out 'who is doing what' for the WHS of the shared workers or shared worksite, and then work together to remove or reduce the risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Employers should also consult with their contractors and suppliers to plan possible alternative methods and/or options.

Communicate pandemic plan and controls measures

Communicate the pandemic plan and control measures to your workers, contractors, suppliers and customers and make sure they know what they need to do, or not do, under the plan.

Good communication strategies will need to be established, both at the workplace and for when workers are at home.

Employers must provide information and instruction to workers, contractors, suppliers and customers:

• to stay at home if they are ill, even if the symptoms are mild
• to go home immediately and call their doctor or the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738 if they have symptoms similar to those of COVID-19
• about practising good personal hygiene
• about any changes to work arrangements, such as changed business hours, workers working from home, changed customer service protocols.

Ways to communicate:

• display posters promoting hygiene and social distancing. Examples of these can be found at Coronavirus.tas.gov.au
• share official government sources — including Coronavirus.tas.gov.au and WorkSafe Tasmania — through your intranet or staff emails
• provide information for customers on your public website or via social media.
RESPONSE: INITIAL ACTION

Throughout this stage:

- **employers** should consult with workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs) and stay up to date with information/directions from [Coronavirus.tas.gov.au](https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au).

- **workers** must co-operate with their employer in implementing control measures, and take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure they don’t do anything that creates or increases a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others.

### Undertake a WHS risk management

Employers should, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs:

- identify and assess the likely risks at the workplace and those associated with the way work is performed. For example, are workers/customers more than 1.5 metres away from each other? How close are workstations? How is work carried out?

- implement suitable control measures to remove or reduce risks. This may include enabling social distancing through flexible working arrangements, reducing non-essential face to face meetings/gatherings, and promoting phone and video communications. Expert advice may be required for high risk work environments or tasks.

### Review pandemic plan and control measures

Employers must, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs and with reference to information/direction from Public Health Services, regularly review the effectiveness of control measures in place and the pandemic plan, and update these if necessary.

A good way to do this is to test and evaluate intervention measures during this early stage; for example, test social distancing measures and evaluate how well they are being implemented.

### Continue to communicate

Continue to communicate the pandemic plan and control measures to your workers, contractors, suppliers and customers and make sure they know what they need to do, or not do, under the plan. See the ‘Preparedness’ section for a re-cap of what to communicate and how, and sources of information.

### Promote good hand washing practices

Everyone — workers, contractors, suppliers and customers — should:

- frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub

- pay particular attention when using the toilet, or helping others with toileting or nappy changing and before preparing and eating food.

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**Situation:**

- Limited number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Tasmania
- Confirmed reports of human to human transmission
Employers should:

- make alcohol-based hand sanitising dispensers available in prominent places around the workplace and ensure they are regularly refilled
- make sure everyone has access to facilities where they can wash their hands with soap and water
- actively promote good hand hygiene in bathroom and kitchen amenities.

Posters promoting these messages can be found at Coronavirus.tas.gov.au.

Hand sanitisers should not be provided as the only hand cleaning option. There are times when soap and water should be used instead; for example, when hands are visibly dirty or after using the toilet.

**Promote good respiratory hygiene**

Everyone — workers, contractors, suppliers and customers — should:

- cough or sneeze into a tissue or the crook of their elbow
- dispose of tissues immediately, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser afterwards
- if unwell, avoid contact with others: shaking hands, touching faces, hugging, and other intimate contact.

Employers should:

- ensure an adequate supply of paper tissues/towelling is available throughout the workplace
- provide closed bins for hygienic disposal of used tissues
- actively promote good respiratory hygiene in prominent places where close customer or worker contact occurs.

**Inspect ventilation and air conditioning systems**

Employers should get confirmation from their building owner that the air conditioning system is properly designed and maintained. For more information see the Australian Standard AS 1668.2-2012, *The use of ventilation and air conditioning in buildings, Part 2: Mechanical ventilation in buildings*.

All internal spaces should be well-ventilated and if possible, fresh air should be allowed to flow. At this stage, for office and similar environments, there is no recommendation to install special air filters to air conditioning systems.

**Keep the work environment clean**

Employers should have systems in place to ensure:

- surfaces (counters, desks and tables) and objects (telephones, keyboards) that are often touched are frequently cleaned and disinfected
- areas the public accesses are frequently cleaned and disinfected
- infection control procedures are reviewed in consultation with cleaning staff
- adequate supplies of cleaning equipment and necessary PPE are available for cleaning staff.
**Workers returning from travel**

On 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister of Australia announced a ban on all overseas travel, with few exceptions. For more information see [SmartTraveller](#).

From 30 March 2020, border restrictions were put in place in Tasmania. For further information see [Coronavirus.tas.gov.au](#).

Returning travellers must follow Australian Government Department of Health advice, self isolate for 14 days, and follow information/direction from [Public Health Services](#).
Throughout this stage:

- **employers** should consult with workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs) and stay up to date with information/directions from [Coronavirus.tas.gov.au](https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au).

- **workers** must co-operate with their employer in implementing control measures, and take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure they don’t do anything that creates or increases a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others.

In a pandemic situation it is reasonable to expect that obligations placed on the employer and worker will include complying with public health advice and any emergency measures.

A declared outbreak may cause significant absenteeism across all industry sectors. Factors affecting attendance could include:

- very high absenteeism due to illness, caring for family members, or fear and anxiety
- strong restrictions and infection control measures in the community and the workplace
- reduced transport availability
- interrupted supply chains/delayed deliveries
- impact of possible death or serious illness among families, friends and work colleagues.

This could significantly threaten the usual conduct of business. Employers must prioritise essential services and adjust work practices and staffing arrangements to manage the risk and impact of the pandemic.

**Review control measures and pandemic plan**

Employers must, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs and with reference to information/directions from [Coronavirus.tas.gov.au](https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au), review their pandemic plan and control measures to ensure they continue to address WHS risks.

This step is very important for businesses located in an outbreak area.

Increased workplace controls will be required to ensure ill workers do not go to work. Anyone with even a mild cough or fever must stay at home.

Based on medical advice, employers and workers must comply with isolation/exclusion periods for workers who are exposed to COVID-19, show symptoms, are ill, or have returned from travel. Consider introducing guidelines on restricted access to enforce this.

Employers should keep a record of workers who become ill and leave the workplace and the people they have had close or casual contact with.
Notify WorkSafe Tasmania

Employers must notify WorkSafe Tasmania where there is a death of a person due to COVID-19 or a person contracts COVID-19 and the death or acquisition of the illness arises out of the conduct of the business or undertaking, and the illness requires immediate treatment as an inpatient in a hospital or it is confirmed that work is a significant contributing factor.

Employers can notify WorkSafe Tasmania by calling 1300 366 322, submitting WorkSafe Tasmania’s incident notification form, or by using their own normal incident notification template that meets the standard of WorkSafe Tasmania.

Employers must notify WorkSafe regardless of whether the Department of Health is already aware of the case.

Support workers

Consider workers who may need to be reassigned to priority tasks that are unfamiliar to them. These workers may be particularly susceptible to injury while adjusting to the new work, particularly anxiety/stress, fatigue, sprains/strains and occupational overuse injury. Control measures for these risks could include:

• close supervision and support, specific training, and monitoring workloads and job demands
• adapting work arrangements — for example, working from home, staggered work shifts — and clear (adapted) performance expectations.

Support workers: mental wellbeing

It’s likely some workers will suffer psychological consequences as a result of the pandemic. Continue to offer information and support, including counselling through an employee assistance program, a supportive workplace culture, or external service providers such as Lifeline or Beyond Blue.

Employers should consider what extra support is needed for workers affected by the death of family, co-workers or friends.

Facilitate working from home and virtual methods of communication

Teleworking — including working from home, teleconferences and video communication — will reduce close contact between workers and may help your business keep operating while your workers stay safe.

Communicate increased workplace controls and the pandemic plan

With the spread of COVID-19 in the community, workers, contractors, suppliers and customers will need accurate and current information on the workplace risks associated with the outbreak. Employers must keep them informed about:

• how these workplace risks will be controlled or minimised by the business
• the current situation and any changed work arrangements.

See the ‘Preparedness’ section for a re-cap of what to communicate and how, and sources of information.
Start planning for the recovery phase

Recovery should be a planned process to normalise work activities. You should plan now how you will:

• progressively stand down risk control measures as the pandemic subsides, with timeframes and measures in line with information/direction from Public Health Services

• train workers who will be re-tasked to priority areas while business activities are transitioning back to normal. Consult with these workers about their skills and training needs and workloads before they are moved to new work

• communicate and consult with workers (in the workplace and at home) about re-starting normal work arrangements

• ensure access to counselling and support services continues for workers in need.
Throughout this stage:

- **Employers** should consult with workers and/or their health and safety representatives (HSRs) and stay up to date with information/directions from Coronavirus.tas.gov.au.

- **Workers** must co-operate with their employer in implementing control measures, and take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure they don’t do anything that creates or increases a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others.

The risk and impact experienced by businesses will not be the same across Tasmania. Some businesses may be able to start recovery activities sooner than others.

### Implement recovery phase plan

Employers must, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs and with reference to information/direction from Public Health Services:

- coordinate the progressive stand down of risk control measures
- manage the transition back into normal business arrangements
- ensure access to counselling and support services continues for workers in need. See the ‘Response: Targeted action’ section for a re-cap of counselling and support.

### Continue to communicate

Keep your workers, contractors, suppliers and customers informed on the changing risk at your workplace and the stand down of risk control measures.

Provide email or phone briefings and information on your staff intranet and public website; and share information from official government sources (such as Coronavirus.tas.gov.au and WorkSafe Tasmania).

### Evaluate the pandemic plan, policies, procedures

Employers must, in consultation with workers and/or their HSRs, evaluate the business’s overall response to COVID-19 so the lessons learned can be applied to future similar events.

Employers must:

- review the pandemic plan and business continuity plan
- review all policies and procedures used for COVID-19
- recommend/implement changes as appropriate; update/adapt systems.

Starting the evaluation process quickly is essential to the business’s future preparedness.