

Workplace guidance for managing suspected and confirmed cases

Purpose

This guidance is intended to assist workplaces to respond in the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, while awaiting formal advice from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The actions may include:

1. Conducting a risk assessment to inform what actions should be taken.
2. Identifying and notifying close contacts to quarantine at home.

Background

Under the [Workplace Directions](#), employees must notify their employer if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and attended the workplace whilst infectious. This means workplaces may be aware of a **confirmed case** linked to their workplace before DHHS have completed their initial processes.

Workplaces may also be aware of a **suspected case** if an employee develops symptoms whilst at work or if the employee notifies their employer that they have developed symptoms and/or are awaiting a COVID-19 test result.

These new obligations have been established to limit further potential exposures to staff, contractors and visitors and to assist in quickly containing any workplace outbreaks that occur.

Initial response

If an employer is advised by an employee that they have symptoms of COVID-19 or are a confirmed case the employer should enquire as to when the employee first developed symptoms. The **infectious period** is taken to be from 48 hours prior to symptom onset up until the point at which the person isolates. The employer should determine whether they attended work during this period.

This document sets out to provide workplaces with the information they need to perform these actions, before contact is made by DHHS.

The response actions required by an employer may include:

- Directing the employee(s) to return home or isolate at the workplace until that can be arranged
- Conduct a risk assessment.
- Close part or all of the workplace.
- Undertake a comprehensive clean of part or all of the workplace.
- Identify and notify workplace related close contacts.
- Liaise with DHHS or their nominee to determine further actions.

Requirements for suspected cases

A single suspected case

A person is a suspected case when they have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 in the absence of an alternative diagnosis. Symptoms include a fever of $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$, night sweats, chills, acute respiratory infection (such as cough, shortness of breath, sore throat), loss of smell, and/or loss of taste. When there is a single suspected case at a workplace:

- The employee should be supported to leave work to go home/get tested. They should travel by private transport where possible, or by taxi or rideshare if necessary. A mask should be worn. They should not travel by public transport.
- If they are unable to leave immediately, they should be supported to isolate at work, preferably in a separate room. They must wear a mask and remain 1.5m from others at all times.
- The employer must advise the employee to undergo a COVID-19 test and self-isolate until the test result is known.
- Where the suspected case was present at the workplace in the period commencing 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms, it is possible that they were infectious while at work. Employers must take all practicable steps to manage the risks posed by the suspected case, including appropriate cleaning.
- The employer should ensure cleaning of their personal workspace and any areas in the work premises frequently used by the worker, including high-touch surfaces likely to have been frequented by the suspected case.
- Employers should inform all workers (including the health and safety representative) to be vigilant about the onset of symptoms of COVID-19 and advise all workers to be tested and self-quarantine if they become symptomatic.
- Employers must ensure materials and records are in order to support contact tracing, particularly from the period of 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms in the suspected case.

It is not necessary to vacate the site (in part of whole) or undertake a risk assessment in response to up to two suspected cases.

Multiple suspected cases

When there are 3 or more suspected cases within a 5-day period, further actions are required. This should be managed as per the requirements for a confirmed case (below) and a risk assessment must be undertaken to inform closure and cleaning. It is not necessary to identify and notify close contacts where there are 3 or more suspected cases – this will only be necessary if a case is confirmed.

In the event that the suspected case(s) test negative to COVID-19, DHHS will not need to be involved and no further action is required on behalf of the employer or workplace.

Requirements for confirmed cases

A confirmed case is defined as a person who has returned a positive COVID-19 test as per departmental guidelines.

- Employees must disclose to their employer as soon as practicable, after they receive notification that they have tested positive for COVID-19 and they attended the workplace in the infectious period.
- Employers must undertake any further steps required to assure the safety of the employees and the workplace as soon as practicable. This includes:
 - Removing the employee from the work premises if required.
 - Cleaning and disinfecting.
 - Identification and notification of workplace close contacts and provision of close contact details to DHHS.
 - Putting in place appropriate control measures.
- Employers must:

- Inform all staff at the workplace to be vigilant about the onset of COVID-19 symptoms and at symptom onset to self-isolate and be tested as soon as reasonably practicable.
- Undertake a risk assessment to inform closure and cleaning requirements (in whole or in part).
- Undertake a comprehensive clean of the workplace, in whole or part, based on the risk assessment.
- Identify workplace close contacts associated with the employee’s attendance at work
- Notify those close contacts to quarantine at home for 14 days.
- Notify DHHS or other entity nominated by the Department, report on actions taken above, provide a copy of risk assessment, provide close contact details, and comply with any further directions from DHHS or WorkSafe as to further closure or cleaning.
- Workplaces must only reopen:
 - Once all obligations under the directions have been complied with; and
 - On the authority of the DHHS Public Health team.

Conducting a risk assessment

Why is a risk assessment required?

The aim of the workplace risk assessment is to:

- Inform the actions a workplace needs to take in the event of a suspected cases or a confirmed case at the workplace, in order to reduce the risk of transmission and reduce the risk to others at the workplace.
- Enable rapid decision making and early response to this risk.

The objectives of the workplace risk assessment are to:

- Inform whether the workplace needs to close in part or in whole (or at all).
- Inform the extent of cleaning required (if any).
- Inform whether contact tracing should commence.
- Prepare the workplace to provide further information to DHHS.

In what scenarios is a risk assessment mandatory?

An employer is required to undertake a risk assessment in the following scenarios:

- When there are 3 or more suspected cases within a 5-day period.
- When there is a confirmed case who attended work during their infectious period.

The employer must do this as soon as reasonably practicable after they become aware of the suspected (3 or more) or confirmed case (1 or more).

Note – A risk assessment is not required for 1-2 suspected cases. The actions required in response to up to two suspected cases are outlined below.

Who should conduct the risk assessment?

Each workplace will have their own Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) systems and procedures in place. The person conducting the risk assessment may be health and safety personnel, the CEO/Managing Director, office manager, or line manager depending on the organisation.

What steps are involved in a risk assessment?

In undertaking the risk assessment, the employer must consider:

- The extent to which the worker has had contact with other staff, contractors, visitors or customers during their infectious period.
- How essential it is to continue operations until the risk is managed.

- The extent to which staff, contractors, visitors or customers would need to use areas of the worksite the worker had been in.

To facilitate the above, the employer will need to collect details from the affected employee, including their date of symptom onset and the dates, locations and details of their movements in the workplace during their infectious period (see **Appendix 1**).

A risk assessment should be performed for each identified suspected or confirmed case. Where there is more than one case, consolidate the information in determining the risk assessment outcome (see **Appendix 2**).

The information collected as part of the risk assessment should be stored securely and should be provided to DHHS or other entity nominated by the Department.

Workplace closure

The information gathered using the checklist in **Appendix 1** should be used to determine which parts of the workplace need to be vacated for cleaning and disinfection, whilst awaiting further review and advice by DHHS (if necessary).

Possible outcomes:

1. Full closure (whole site vacated).
2. Partial closure (part of site vacated).
3. Continue operations as usual.

Unless it is unreasonable to do so:

- All areas used or likely to have been used by the suspected or confirmed case must be vacated for cleaning and disinfection whilst awaiting further instruction and review by DHHS.
- If any parts of the workplace remain open, the employer must ensure these areas do not pose any ongoing risk of transmission to other staff, visitors or contractors who visit the site.
- If this cannot be achieved, or if suspected or confirmed case has accessed multiple areas across the site that cannot be effectively and safely vacated for cleaning and disinfection, the whole site must be vacated until further assessment by DHHS.

Cleaning and disinfection

Advice on cleaning is available at:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cleaning-and-disinfecting-reduce-covid-19-transmission-tips-non-healthcare-settings>

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/preventing-infection-workplace-covid-19#how-to-clean-and-disinfect-after-a-covid-19-case-in-the-workplace>

Communications

Following the identification of a suspected or confirmed case, workplaces should ensure there is appropriate communication to staff, contractors, visitors and customers, and other relevant stakeholders.

This may include:

- Notification that there has been a suspected or confirmed case (noting it is not appropriate to disclose the identity of unwell individuals).
- Informing all workers (including health and safety representatives) to be vigilant about the onset of COVID-19 symptoms and to self-quarantine if they become unwell.
- Notifying close contacts, directing them to leave the work premises and advise them to self-quarantine
- Contacting DHHS to notify of the actions undertaken, provide a copy of the risk assessment, to provide contact details of identified close contacts.

The workplace must comply with any further directions given by DHHS or Worksafe.

Contract tracing

Once the risk assessment is complete, and the workplace (or part of site) closed and vacated, the employer should identify and notify close contacts.

The following section provides guidance on how to identify and notify close contacts associated with the cases attendance at work.

Note that DHHS perform the contact tracing for the other close contacts of the confirmed case (e.g. family, personal and other close contacts). The workplace is only required to identify and notify contacts associated with the worker's attendance at work.

Close contact definition

A close contact is someone who had greater than 15 minutes face-to-face, cumulative, or the sharing of a closed space for more than two hours, with a confirmed case during their infectious period. The case's infectious period commences 48 hours prior to onset of symptoms (or if asymptomatic, 48 hours prior to test date).

Exceptions

Except in a healthcare setting, (where additional Infection Prevention Control precautions apply) persons wearing face masks or other personal protective equipment (PPE) are still considered 'close contacts' if they meet the close contact definition.

In some circumstances, such as in higher risk settings and where there is evidence of transmission, DHHS may expand the criteria for a close contact in that workplace (e.g. everyone working the same shift as the case may be classified as a close contact even if they do not meet the above criteria). This will be determined by DHHS on a case by case basis.

Process

Determine what staff members, contractors, visitors or other persons at the workplace may have had close contact with the case during their infectious period. This may involve checking rosters, time sheets, sign-in sheets and visitors logs to determine who may have had contact with the case. Workplaces are required to keep an [attendance register](#) to assist this process. For every employee or visitor to the workplace meeting the criteria for a close contact, record their name, contact details and other relevant information in the [close contacts spreadsheet](#) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid-19-close-contacts-spreadsheet-victorian-workplaces-xls>> in as much detail as is available.

Note that the employer cannot disclose the identity of the case to other employees, unless the case gives permission for them to do so.

Once the list of potential close contacts is complete, the employer must contact the workplace close contacts to notify them that they are a close contact of a confirmed case and inform them that they need to isolate for 14 days. The 14-day period commences from the day of their last contact with the confirmed case.

Notifying close contacts

It is preferable for employers to telephone to notify close contacts, however use of text messages is also acceptable. It is important that it is done as soon as possible to ensure workers are quarantined.

The employer should inform them that DHHS will contact them via text message with further information, and that they should seek testing if they develop any symptoms consistent with COVID-19. The employer should support the close contacts to exclude themselves from work and must not let them attend the workplace.

The following message should be sent:

You have been assessed as a close contact of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) through your attendance at [insert name of worksite/business]. You are required to self-quarantine for 14 days from [insert date]. The Department of Health and Human Services will contact you via text message to confirm the details of your required quarantine period, and to provide you with further information. You must isolate at home and must not

attend work during this time. If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 you should get tested. Please see the [DHHS close contacts factsheet](#)".

The employer should distribute the DHHS close contacts factsheet to the workplace close contacts. For further information see: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/novel-coronavirus-close-contact-what-you-need-know>

Notifying DHHS

Employers should notify DHHS by sending the completed risk assessment and close contact spreadsheet to COVIDEmployerNotifications@dhhs.vic.gov.au as soon as is practicable when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 that has been infectious at the workplace. Employers can call **1300 651 160** if they do not hear from DHHS within 24 hours following notification.

Re-opening

Following review of the initial actions by the employer, DHHS will work with the workplace to determine when it is safe to reopen. This may involve putting in place additional control measures to minimise the risk of further cases or transmission. DHHS will provide final approval that the workplace can reopen.

Workplaces can generally reopen once:

- All workplace close contacts have been identified, notified and are isolating.
- The workplace has been comprehensively cleaned.
- Appropriate control measures are in place to minimise further transmission.
- A 'clean' workforce is available to return to work (i.e. employees that are not close contacts or cases and therefore do not need to be in isolation).
- DHHS has authorised the reopening.

Employees who are close contacts will not be able to return to work until they have completed their 14-day quarantine period, provided they have no symptoms of COVID-19 and have not returned a positive test result in the interim. All identified close contacts will be required to undertake a COVID-19 test at day 11 or after of their quarantine period. They will require a negative result prior to their quarantine ending.

More information

Call the Department of Health and Human Services on to discuss any questions you have. If you need a translator first call 131 450, then request the to be put through to the department on 1300 651 160.

Information on public health directions applying to employers is available at:

- <https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/covid-safe-business/creating-a-covid-safe-workplace>.

You can also refer to the following guidance:

- [WorkSafe: Managing COVID-19 risks – face coverings in workplaces](#)
- [DHHS: Preventing infection in the workplace](#)
- [DHHS: Preparing for a case of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in your workplace](#)
- [DHHS: Planning and responding to cases of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [DHHS: Cleaning and disinfecting to reduce COVID-19 transmission](#)
- [WorkSafe: Other relevant industry specific guidance](#)

Employer COVID-19 notification form

Workplace details	
Name	
Address	
Type of workplace	
Phone number	
Key workplace contact	
Name	
Job title	
Phone number	
Email	
Confirmed case details	
Name	
Date of birth	
Address	
Phone number	
Date of positive test	
Date/time of symptom onset	
Attended work during infectious period (Yes/No)	

Note: infectious period = 48 hours before symptom onset (for asymptomatic cases, taken as 48 hours prior to test date).

Appendix 1

Workplace risk assessment

Workplace risk assessment	
Information about the case(s)	
<p>Determine the infectious period <i>The infectious period is taken as 48 hours before symptom onset.</i></p> <p>Find out when the individual developed symptoms. If they did not have symptoms, the infectious period commences 48 hours prior to when the test (swab) was taken.</p>	
<p>Determine the possible exposure times. Dates and times individual(s) attended the workplace during their infectious period.</p>	
<p>Determine the work area or sites used by the individual during those times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, include approximate duration of time spent in each location or area within a site (e.g. specific rooms or spaces within a larger building, whether enclosed or outdoors etc.). • Were there any areas where it is less likely the individual was able to physically distance from others? 	
<p>Communal facilities or shared areas used or likely to have been used by the individual (e.g. hallways, lifts, bathrooms, tea rooms, kitchens, meeting rooms etc.).</p>	
<p>Food and drink outlets or onsite shops used by the individual.</p>	
<p>Assess if there has been close contact by the case with others on breaks (including smoking breaks), before and after work, in car parks and in transit to and from work (e.g. carpooling). Close contact in these circumstances will also determine whether a person is a close contact.</p>	
Temporal factors	
<p>Assess the timing and shifts worked by the case. Determine how many people may have been exposed to the case. Was there a crossover (contamination) between the shift the case worked and the</p>	

<p>shift before/after? Are there household contacts of the case on other shifts?</p>	
<p>Work site layout</p>	
<p>Can the area used by the individual be reliably closed for cleaning whilst maintaining operations in another part of the worksite?</p>	
<p>Other site considerations</p>	
<p>Identify any unique site management requirements.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal welfare and management considerations associated with site closure and/or cleaning. • Requirement of exposed key workers to carry out vital tasks to keep essential services running. • Critical need for workplace to remain open. 	

Appendix 2

Outcome of risk assessment

Risk assessment outcome			
Actions taken as a result of risk assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Continue operations as usual	<input type="checkbox"/> Partial closure (part of site vacated) <u>List areas or worksite vacated:</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Full closure (whole site vacated)
Reason or reasons for decision (tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual not present at work site during infectious period	<input type="checkbox"/> All areas used by suspected or confirmed case safely and reliably vacated for cleaning and disinfection	<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to ensure that areas that remain open do not pose any ongoing risk of transmission to other staff, visitors or contractors who visit the site
	<input type="checkbox"/> Unreasonable to implement partial or full closure of site	<input type="checkbox"/> Unreasonable to implement full closure of the site but partial closure achieved	<input type="checkbox"/> The individual(s) has accessed multiple areas across the site that cannot be effectively vacated for cleaning and disinfection
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Provide details:	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Provide details:	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Provide details:
Date:			
Completed by:		Name:	
		Role:	
Endorsed by:		Name:	
		Role:	

For any questions

Coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398 (24 hours)

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only

To receive this document in another format phone 1300 651 160 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required.

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Available at: [DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-disease-covid-19)