

KEY STEPS TO CREATING A COVIDSAFE WORKPLACE

12 May 2020

On 8 May 2020 the Prime Minister set out a [Roadmap to a COVIDSAFE Australia](#).

The roadmap sets out a three-stage framework that includes steps for employees to return to work.

There is one key theme in the roadmap that all employers need to comply with: making sure their workplaces are COVIDSafe. Safe Work Australia has issued [comprehensive guidelines](#) for businesses to follow to minimise the risk of COVID-19 exposure in their workplace. In this guide we highlight key steps that businesses need to take to comply with the Safe Work Australia guidelines.

Physical distancing requirements

There are two key physical distancing requirements that workplaces need to maintain where possible:

- there must be at least 4 square metres of space per person in each space; and
- everyone must keep at least 1.5 metres apart from each other.

Both of these requirements need to be met simultaneously – one is not a substitute for the other.

How to meet the 4 square metre rule

The amount of people you can have in a space can be determined as follows:

- work out the area of the space by multiplying the length of the space in metres by the width of the space in metres;
- divide the area of the space by 4.

For example, if you have a space that is 10 metres long and 10 metres wide, the number of people you can have in the space is: $(10 \times 10) \div 4 = 25$.

It's a good idea to do a walk through of your workplace with a tape measure to work out how many people you can have in each space. If you would normally have more people in a space than is allowed, consider what adjustments you need to make to come within the 4 square metre rule. You can also display signs to let employees know how many people are permitted in each space.

If you need to reduce the number of people onsite to meet the 4 square metre rule, some steps you can take are as follows:

- facilitate working from home;

- split your employees into teams that do alternating shifts (with time between shifts to ensure there is no overlap of staff);
- reduce the number of tasks to be completed each day or postpone non-essential tasks.

Meeting the 1.5 metre rule

Employers need to make adjustments to their workplace to ensure people can keep at least 1.5 metres apart from each other. The following are some ways you can do this:

- spread out furniture to increase distancing;
- stagger start, finish and break times to reduce the number of workers using common areas at the same time;
- consider floor or wall markings to identify 1.5 metre distancing requirements;
- if possible, have a separate entry and exit so there is less contact;
- review tasks that usually require close interaction and identify ways to modify them to allow for physical distancing;
- postpone non-essential meetings or training or use technology to avoid face-to-face time;
- for essential face-to-face meetings or training: keep attendees to a minimum; keep time to a minimum; only use spaces that allow physical distancing;
- ensure the 1.5 metre rule is maintained in lifts, which may require only one person travelling at a time;
- ensure the 1.5 metre rule is maintained in vehicles, which means having only 2 people in a 5-seat vehicle, with one person driving and one person in the back seat, and external airflow enabled or windows open.

It's also a good idea to display the Department of Health's [Keeping Your Distance poster](#) prominently in the workplace.

What if physical distancing is not possible?

There will be times when physical distancing is not possible because of the nature of the task. If it is not possible to avoid doing the task, employers should undertake a risk assessment to determine what control measures are reasonably practical to eliminate or minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These measures could include:

- using personal protective equipment (such as face masks and gloves) to prevent the risk of transmission;
- minimising the number of people in the area to essential workers only;
- staggering start, finish and break times;
- moving tasks to different areas of the workplace or offsite;
- separating workers into different teams who work at different times or locations;
- ensuring each worker has their own equipment and tools, including their own computer equipment and phones.

Workplace hygiene

Employers must ensure their employees practice good hygiene in the workplace.

This means regularly washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and drying them with a clean paper towel. Hands must also be washed before and after eating, after coughing or sneezing, after going to the toilet and when changing tasks or after touching potentially contaminated surfaces.

If it is not possible to wash hands with soap and water, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient must be used.

Employers can display the WHO's [poster on How to Handwash](#) in their bathrooms.

Employers should also ensure their employees:

- have no physical contact, including shaking hands;
- cover their coughs and sneezes with their elbow or a clean tissue (with no spitting);
- avoid touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth;
- dispose tissues and cigarette butts in closed bins;
- wash hands before and after smoking;
- clean and disinfect shared equipment after use;
- wash their body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day;
- follow hygiene standards in common areas, including cleaning up after themselves and avoiding putting items like phones on meal surfaces.

Employers should also:

- ensure their bathrooms are kept clean and in good working order;
- ensure their bathrooms are properly stocked with soap and paper towel;
- provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser at entries and exits and around the office;
- ensure that closed rubbish bins are placed around the office;
- consider opening windows or adjusting air-conditioning for more ventilation in common areas and limiting recirculated air-conditioning where possible.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Cleaning

Workplaces must be cleaned at least daily using a detergent and water solution.

Surfaces that are touched multiple times per day should be cleaned daily. This could include tabletops, door handles, light switches, desks, toilets, taps, TV remotes, kitchen surfaces and cupboard handles.

Cleaning should be more frequent if surfaces are visibly dirty, there is a spill or they are touched by different people (eg lift buttons or door handles).

Items that are not touched more than once each day can be cleaned less frequently.

You don't need to clean every surface – only surfaces that are touched need to be cleaned. There are some surfaces that are never touched (eg ceilings, walls, certain cupboards) and these do not need to be cleaned. Also, areas that have not had human contact in the last few days do not need to be cleaned.

If equipment is shared between workers it should be cleaned between uses. Workers should also regularly clean personal items, like glasses and phones.

Crockery and cutlery should be washed in a dishwasher on the highest setting possible or hand washed in hot soapy water.

If your workplace operates in shifts it should be cleaned between shifts.

Workers who do cleaning should wear gloves and wash their hands thoroughly before and after wearing gloves.

Disinfecting

Disinfecting is necessary if there has been a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 at your workplace or if there are high volumes of workers, customers or visitors that are likely to touch surfaces.

Safe Work Australia's guide to cleaning and disinfecting your workplace

For more specific information about the cleaning that is required in particular areas or for particular items, please see [Safe Work Australia's guide on how to clean and disinfect your workplace](#).

What to do if an employee is unwell

Anyone who is unwell should not be in the workplace and should be directed to stay home until they are well again.

If they have symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath they should be asked to seek medical advice and be tested for COVID-19. They should follow medical guidance and should be given medical clearance before returning to work.

What to do if you suspect an employee may have COVID-19 or may have been exposed to COVID-19?

If you suspect that an employee may have COVID-19 or may have been exposed to COVID-19 you must act promptly and take reasonable steps to manage the risks. Employers should follow [Safe Work Australia's steps for dealing with COVID-19 at the workplace](#). More detailed information can be found on [SWA's website](#).

Safe Work Australia's guidelines

For more detailed information on ensuring you have a COVID-Safe workplace and for industry specific information, please visit [Safe Work Australia's website on COVID-19 information for workplaces](#).