

Public Transport: Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require employers* to take care of the health, safety and welfare of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes:

- > providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety
- > making sure public transport does not expose passengers to health and safety risks
- > providing adequate and accessible facilities for the welfare of workers in carrying out their work, and
- > monitoring the health of workers and the conditions of the workplace for the purpose of preventing illness or injury.

As an employer, you must identify risks at the workplace, and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks.

Public transport workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19

The enclosed spaces and limited ventilation of public transport increase the risk of workers and passengers being exposed to COVID-19 because of the potential for close contact between people.

The risk of exposure to COVID-19 cannot be completely eliminated in these circumstances due to the difficulty of achieving [physical distancing](#) between people. However, you must do everything reasonably practicable to keep these workers and passengers a safe physical distance apart of at least 1.5 metres apart.

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 results in delays to your service.



Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Physical distancing

[Physical distancing](#) – keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart - this will be challenging in some public transport workplaces and for some transport activities, but it is a key measure to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Practical measures to encourage [physical distancing](#):

- > Limit passenger capacity in buses, ferries, trams and trains. This can be achieved by:
 - > calculating the safe number of travellers per vehicle and the positions in which they should sit in that vehicle to achieve 1.5 metres distance apart, and
 - > frequently reminding passengers to sit 1.5 metres apart, or at least as far apart as possible if this distance is not achievable.
 - > providing extra services during peak times or where data indicates there is a high level of patronage.
- > Allocate pre-booked seats to maximise physical distancing – at least 1.5 metres apart where possible.
- > Allow customers to only touch the card reader furthest from the driver
- > Block off the first row of seats on buses or areas immediately around workers on other forms of public transport.
- > Encourage passengers to [physically distance](#) themselves by keeping at least 1.5 metres from each other on platforms, when using escalators and lifts and when queuing to board.
- > Ask passengers on the platform or station to stand well back until all passengers have disembarked.
- > Create floor markings that provide minimum guide distances between passengers.
- > Encourage passengers to travel outside of peak times.
- > Alter the way passengers enter and exit the vehicle. For example:
 - > Require passengers to board only through the rear door to minimise exposure to the driver (unless the customer requires assistance); or
 - > Require passengers to enter and exit through separate doors.
- > reconsidering the need for ticket inspectors or reducing the number of locations they visit during this time.

You should put processes in place to regularly monitor and review the implementation of [physical distancing](#) measures to ensure they remain effective.

If [physical distancing](#) measures introduce new health and safety risks (e.g. because they impact communication), you need to identify and manage those risks too.

The Safe Work Australia website has links to a range of [posters and resources](#) to help remind workers and others of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures that are necessary to stop its spread. These posters can be placed in client-facing work environments (e.g. workplace entrances, buses, platforms).

Health checks and quarantine

You must monitor the health of your workers 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.
- > Stop workers working if they are displaying symptoms
- > Stop 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 regimes will need to be increased.

- > Frequently touched surfaces, including handrails and doors, should be cleaned regularly using appropriate detergent solutions. Once cleaned, they should ideally be disinfected regularly using appropriate disinfectant solutions.
- > Personal items used in the workplace such as glasses and phones should be cleansed and ideally disinfected frequently (e.g. by using isopropyl alcohol wipes).
- > Workplace amenities including kitchens, lunch rooms, communal areas, change rooms, toilets, showers, drink fountains and vending machines should be cleaned industrially and the frequency of this cleaning should increase.

Workers should continue to use standard cleaning practices at the end of each shift, as part of good hygiene practice.

In the event of a passenger spreading droplets (such as sneezing, coughing or vomiting), workers should clean surfaces with appropriate disinfectant wipes so that the potential spread of infection can be minimised.

Drivers and other customer service staff should be equipped and trained in the ability to remove waste safely and disinfect surfaces during their shift. To minimise the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, the person cleaning should wear gloves and wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves. Gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be made available throughout the workplace.

The workplace, should provide closed bins for workers and passengers to hygienically dispose of waste and rubbish such as used tissues immediately (or if away from amenities, as soon as possible) after use. Hand washing facilities or alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be available for workers to use after they dispose of their waste.

If the increased availability of hand sanitiser introduces new health and safety risks (e.g. accidental ingestion by children), you need to identify and manage those risks too

You must monitor workplace conditions, including facilities, to ensure the measures in place to eliminate or manage the risks arising from COVID-19 are efficient and effective.

See Safe Work Australia's [Cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 fact sheet](#) or the Department of Health's information sheet on [Environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19](#) for further information.

Worker and passenger hygiene

Workers are required to practice [good hygiene](#). Workers must wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand washing should be done before and after eating and after going to the toilet. Other hygiene measures should include:

- > covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
- > immediately disposing of tissues properly
- > using alcohol-based hand sanitisers with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient
- > cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and shared equipment
- > limiting contact with others, including through shaking hands or touching a passenger's payment card
- > 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 the COVID-19 virus, workers should also:

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

You should put processes in place to regularly monitor and review the implementation of hygiene measures to ensure they remain effective.

Adequate and accessible facilities

You must ensure there are adequate and accessible facilities to support the implementation of measures to achieve physical distancing and [good hygiene](#).

Washroom facilities for workers and passengers must be properly stocked and have adequate supplies of soap, water and toilet paper. Washroom facilities must be kept clean and in good working order.

Workers should have access to alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Passengers at high volume stations and platforms should also have access to hand sanitiser.

Consider whether there are an adequate number of hand washing stations to sustain the increase in workers practicing good hygiene.

If creating a new eating or common area to enable [physical distancing](#), you must ensure these areas are adequately equipped (e.g drinking water, rubbish bins), and protected from the elements, contaminants and hazards.

You must ensure all facilities are in good working order and are clean and safe.

For further information on providing adequate and accessible facilities, including providing facilities for temporary, mobile or remote workplaces see the [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#).

Do drivers and customer service staff require face shields, masks or other personal protective equipment?

Practising [good hygiene](#) is the best defence against most viruses. Workers should:

- > wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- > cover coughs and sneezes, dispose of tissues and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and
- > if unwell, avoid contact with others and practice [physical distancing](#) by staying more than 1.5 metres away from people.

The following control measures are more effective than PPE:

- > installing screens where possible for drivers;
- > encouraging customer service staff to stay behind information booths or desks or where not available, to maintain a sufficient distance from passengers; and
- > requiring passengers to use a payment card, prepaid ticket, or other eligible pass in order to limit the use of money handling by drivers and ticket sales people. Where workers must handle money or eftPOS machines, provide them with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

PPE such as gloves and masks can then be put in place to supplement the above controls.

Further information about PPE including additional employer obligations can be found on the [PPE page of our website](#).

Keep workers and passengers informed

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

You must also inform passengers about the risk of exposure and good hygiene through increased signage and information. 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 around platforms and in trains, trams and buses.

Consultation and communicating with workers

You must consult with your workers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. This means you must consult when:

- > assessing the risk COVID-19 presents to the health and safety of workers
- > deciding on the control measures to put in place to eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19
- > deciding on the adequacy of facilities for the welfare of workers (e.g. hand washing facilities), and
- > proposing other changes to the workplace as a result of COVID-19 which may affect health and safety.

If you and the workers have agreed to procedures for consultation, the consultation must be in accordance with those procedures.

You must allow workers to express their views and raise work health and safety issues that may arise directly or indirectly because of COVID-19. You must take the views of workers into account when making decisions and advise workers of your decision.

Workers are most likely to know about the risks of their work. Involving them will help build commitment to this process and any changes.

Consultation does not require consensus or agreement but you must allow your workers to be part of the decision making process for COVID-19 related matters.

If workers are represented by Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) you must include them in the consultation process.

The [model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#) can provide more information about your duties to consult.

You need to communicate clearly with workers about control measures. This means providing clear direction and guidance about what is expected of workers.

Workers must know:

- > when to stay away from the workplace
- > what action to take if they become unwell

- > what symptoms to be concerned about.

You should 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.

You should provide workers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns, and access to support services, including employee assistance programs. A list of support services to help workers is provided below.

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.

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

How can I meet my officer duty during the COVID-19 outbreak?

- > Keep your knowledge of the COVID-19 situation up to date. Follow advice from authoritative sources such as the Australian Government Department of Health and check daily for any updates to safety advice.
- > Ensure you understand your business and its WHS hazards and risks. Risk assessments are a useful tool to help identify WHS hazards and risks, as well as strategies to help manage them. Where you have risk assessments in place, they may need to be reviewed to ensure they are up to date. It may not be possible because of the work you do to facilitate all workers to work from home, but there are many steps you can take to minimise the risks in the work environment.
- > Make sure your premises are properly resourced to manage WHS risks during the COVID-19 outbreak, and check that the resources are being used.
- > Review your policies, procedures and reporting process to ensure they remain current for any incidents, hazards and other WHS issues that arise during this time. Update these materials if necessary.
- > Ensure these policies, procedures and processes are communicated clearly and are being followed.
- > Consult with workers and ensure there is a means for them to raise any concerns about the steps you are taking to manage the risks.

Further information is available on [who is an officer in the workplace](#) and their [health and safety duty](#).

Further information and resources

SWA materials

- > [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- > [Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks.](#)
- > For general advice for employers on managing risks from the COVID-19 virus, go to [COVID-19 Information for workplaces](#)

Other useful resources

- > Australia Government Department of Health Fact Sheet – [Information for public transport \(taxis, ride-hail services, trains, buses, trams etc\)](#)

Support resources

- > [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- > [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
- > [Australian Tax Office – COVID-19](#)
- > Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
- > [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)
- > Information on the recent restrictions announced by the Australian Government is available at [Australia.gov.au](#).

Support services

- > [Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#)
- > [Heads Up – Healthy workplaces support](#)
- > [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)
- > [Lifeline](#)

*Please note. To ensure this information 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’](#).