

# Stevedores and port operations: 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
- > 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.

## **Port workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19**

Port workers, including stevedores and other port operations are essential in keeping Australian supply chains flowing.

Due to the nature of the work and operating environment, many workers cannot work from home and must continue to interact with workers and other persons at the port, including foreign vessels and their crew. This can increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

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 result in delays or disruption to your work.

## Requirements for commercial vessels and crew

Australian Border Force has imposed a number of requirements on maritime crew on commercial vessels, who are exempt from the mandatory 14-day quarantine period.

The following restrictions apply to commercial vessels (excluding cruise ships) when they are berthing in Australia within 14 days of departing their last international port of call:

- > All crew must remain on board while the vessel is berthed in Australia.
- > Crew may disembark to conduct essential vessel functions, however crew must wear personal protective equipment (PPE) while performing these functions.
- > Crew should only interact with non-crew members when it is critical for the safe operation and loading/unloading of the vessel.
- > Crew must also use PPE in public spaces on board the vessel while non-crew members are on-board.

These restrictions apply until 14 days have elapsed since the vessel departed their last foreign port before Australia, and where there are no reports of crew being or having been unwell and no suspected cases of COVID-19 on board. Where a crew member has been reported as unwell, local biosecurity officers (in consultation with the local health authority) will provide advice on additional measures.

For further information on these arrangements please refer to the [advice from](#) Australian Border Force.

If stevedoring or other port operators observe maritime crew not adhering to these restrictions, operators should request that the maritime crew and their company comply with the restrictions and requirements. If non-compliance continues, operators should notify the relevant authority (such as biosecurity officers at the port). If the non-compliance is presenting safety risks to workers, operators should cease work associated with the vessel.

## Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Separate to the measures required of maritime crew, stevedores and port operators must also take measures to reduce the risk of workers being exposed to COVID-19.

### Physical distancing

[Physical distancing](#) – keeping everyone at least 1.5 metres physically apart – may be challenging in some stevedoring and port operations, but it is a key measure to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

This is particularly important where a worker must interact with commercial vessels and crew before the 14-day period from their last international port of call has expired.

- > Limit physical interactions between workers.
  - > Communication with maritime crew should be conducted via methods such as mobile phone or radio wherever possible.



- > Where close interaction is required, and the 14-day period has not expired, ensure maritime crew are wearing PPE where possible prior to workers boarding the vessel and interacting with the crew.
  - *You may not be able to control the provision of PPE to crew by their employer. You could monitor this through a combination of worker feedback and proactive engagement with the crew's employer. You could consider providing PPE to crew where it is evident that their employer has not provided it, to protect your workers.*
- > Maintain at least 1.5 metres physical distancing between all workers and maritime crew wherever possible.
- > If workers suspect they have been in contact with maritime crew displaying symptoms of COVID-19 while on board the vessel, workers should report this and make themselves known to biosecurity officers at the port.
- > Limit physical interactions between workers and other persons at the port
  - > Workers who can work from home (e.g. office staff) should work from home.
  - > Review tasks and processes that usually require close interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between workers where practical and safe to do so (e.g. use single operator equipment where possible).
  - > Split workers' shifts to reduce the number of workers onsite at any given time
  - > Allow additional time between shifts to limit staff interaction and enable time for cleaning.
  - > Use methods such as mobile phone or radio to communicate.
  - > Postpone non-essential gatherings or training.
  - > For essential gatherings, conduct in spaces that enable workers to keep the required physical distance of at least 1.5 metres apart, ideally in outdoor spaces.
  - > Reduce the number of workers utilising common areas at a given time (e.g. by staggering meal breaks and start times and encouraging workers to eat and take breaks outside where possible).
  - > Provide additional common areas and change rooms
  - > Spread out furniture in common areas.
  - > Create specific walkways throughout the port to maintain physical separation and implement changes to access points to enable workers to enter and exit through different points/gates/doors where practicable.
  - > Eliminate or limit visitors to the port. Conduct meetings by phone or video conference
- > Implement systems for maintaining 1.5 metre physical distancing at turnstiles for workers when entering port areas.
- > If 1.5 metre distancing cannot be maintained when performing essential tasks (e.g. lashing) then limit the number of workers in the same area where possible. This may involve allowing more time to complete tasks.
- > Limit worker numbers
  - > Reduce the number of tasks to be completed each day.
  - > Postpone non-essential work.
- > Place signage about physical distancing around the workplace
- > Split transports of workers and visitors
  - > Limit the numbers of persons in vehicles to maintain 1.5 metre physical distancing. For example, five seater vehicles should be limited to one passenger in the rear and the

driver. Larger vehicles may carry more passengers as long as distancing can be maintained, such as keeping at least one row of separation between passengers on a bus.

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).

## 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.
- > Consider implementing temperature checks of your workers before commencing shifts.

If your worker is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 at work, you should follow the process set out in our [Suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 at work](#) infographic.

Where a crew member has been reported as unwell, advise that the crew member be isolated on the vessel in a single cabin and contact local biosecurity officers for further advice.

## 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 schedules will need to be increased.

- > Frequently touched surfaces (such as handrails, door, equipment, plant and controls) 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.
- > Other places that multiple workers frequent during a shift or over the course of a day, such as plant operator cabins.

Also consider reducing the number of touch points for workers. For example, leaving access doors open, where appropriate.

Workers should be provided with cleaning agents and trained to clean down plant or equipment immediately after use, paying particular attention to operator controls, steering wheels, windows, computer equipment, door handles and ladders. Transport vehicles should also be cleaned frequently. Workers should each be provided with their own equipment if possible.

Gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitiser (with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient) should be made available throughout the workplace. If possible, make hand sanitiser available at entry and exit points so workers can use it when arriving and leaving.

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.

The workplace should provide closed bins for workers 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 web page](#) or the Department of Health information sheet on [Environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19](#) for further information.

### *Worker hygiene*

Workers must 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

- > 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 COVID-19, workers should also:

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

To enhance worker hygiene standards, you should also:

- > adequately delineate between work and common areas. This could include reminding workers (with [posters](#) or through training) to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or sanitise their hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before entering and exiting a common area.
- > inform workers of workplace etiquette and standards that are expected when utilising these common areas (cleaning up after yourself, placing rubbish in bins provided, avoiding putting items such as phones on meal surfaces etc.)

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

### *Personal Protective Equipment*

You must provide workers with appropriate PPE, and information and training on how and why they are required to use it. PPE can include gloves and face masks.

Masks can be an effective control measure for workplaces such as hospitals, medical centres or aged care facilities where workers have frequent, close contact with sick or vulnerable people and might be exposed to respiratory substances (e.g. through coughs or sneezes). However, the [Australian Government Department of Health advises](#) that most other people will not benefit from wearing a mask as there is little evidence supporting the widespread use of surgical masks in healthy people to protect against exposure to COVID-19.

Employers should also be aware that wearing a mask may give rise to new WHS risks.

Where work tasks require workers to work on-board a commercial vessel, and the 14-day period (since their last international port of call) has not expired, in addition to physical distancing measures, workers should:

- > wear gloves when appropriate and avoid touching their face – gloves should be changed regularly, and
- > wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or sanitise their hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before and after wearing the gloves and immediately after disembarking the vessel.

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 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. Workplaces should also be well stocked with alcohol-based 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 physically 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 a temporary, mobile or remote workplace see the [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#).

## Deliveries and contractors attending the workplace

Non-essential visits to the port should be cancelled or postponed.

Deliveries and other contractors who need to attend the workplace should be given clear instructions of your requirements while they are on site.

Minimise the number of workers attending to deliveries and contractors as much as possible. Make alcohol-based hand sanitiser available for workers after physically handling deliveries.

Direct visiting truck drivers to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods such as mobile phones to communicate with your workers wherever possible.

Use, and ask deliveries and contractors to use, electronic paper work where possible, to minimise physical interaction. Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. For instance, see whether a confirmation email or a photo of the loaded or unloaded goods can be accepted as proof of delivery or collection (as applicable). If a pen or other utensil is required for signature you can ask that the pen or utensil is cleaned or sanitised before use. For pens, you may wish to use your own.

## Keep workers 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.

The Australian Government Department of Health has a range [of posters and other resources](#) aimed at educating the public about COVID-19.



## 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.

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.

## 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 all that these are communicated clearly and processes 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 risks in stevedoring](#)
- > [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- > [Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#)
- > [Officer Duties](#)
- > For general advice for employers on managing risks to exposure to the COVID-19 virus, go to [COVID-19 Information for workplaces](#)

### Other useful resources

- > Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
- > [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)
- > [Australian Border Force – Restrictions on commercial maritime vessels and crew](#)
- > [Department of Health fact sheet – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information for the marine industry](#)
- > [Department of Health fact sheet – Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Information for marine pilots](#)
- > [Department of Health fact sheet – Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Information for border staff](#)

### Support resources

- > [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- > [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
- > [Australian Tax Office – COVID-19](#)

### Support services

- > [Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#)

- > [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)
- > [Heads Up – Healthy workplaces support](#)
- > [Lifeline](#)

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