Best Practice COVID-19 Safety: For Employers

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KEEP IT
COVID safe

This factsheet provides best practice guidance to employers about minimising the spread of infectious illnesses in the workplace. This includes COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses that spread from person to person.

Please use this information alongside:

- **other Tasmanian Public Health best practice guidance for specific workplaces (where relevant) and specific controls**

- **guidance provided by WorkSafe Tasmania.**

Everyone's responsibilities

Everyone is responsible for protecting themselves and each other from COVID-19, including by:

- staying home and getting tested if they have any COVID-19, cold or flu symptoms

- following Public Health requirements

- practising COVID-safe behaviour.

Under the *Public Health Act 1997*:

- people who test positive to COVID-19 must

  > isolate for at least seven days from the date of their positive test result

  > inform Public Health of their positive result, if they used a rapid antigen test (RAT)

- close contacts of people who test positive to COVID-19 must:

  > inform their employer that they are a close contact

  > test for COVID-19 every day they leave their home, for seven days from becoming a close contact

  > wear a facemask (unless exempt) in indoor settings outside the home

  > isolate and test immediately if they have symptoms

  > not visit high risk settings: residential care settings, hospitals, correctional facilities (including prisons) and support schools (employers may permit close contacts to work in high-risk settings, with risk controls according to the workplace risk assessment).

- people organising large events (over 5 000 people or over 2 000 people for a music event) must use an event-specific COVID-19 safety plan approved by the Director of Public Health.

Employers' legal responsibilities

Employers have legal responsibilities under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* to take steps to minimise, so far as reasonably practicable, the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses in the workplace.

As an employer, you must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of your workers, contractors, volunteers, visitors, customers and others in your workplace. As well as being a legal requirement, this is important for the health and wellbeing of your workers; for workers and client confidence in your business; and for your business continuity – including minimising workers absences.

Risk assessment

To comply with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* and minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading in your workplace, it is important to do a risk assessment and implement controls. Your risk assessment should not be a one-off action. Continue to assess the health and safety risks in the workplace as circumstances change or on a regular basis. The timing of regular reviews will depend on the risk profile of your business.

The level of risk and required controls will vary between workplaces, and be influenced by:

- the vaccination level and amount of illness in the local community

- whether your workplace is indoor or outdoor

- whether workers are at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace, for example if your workers provide services to people with COVID-19 or have contact with large numbers of people at work

- whether your workforce includes people at risk of severe illness from COVID-19

- whether your workers provide services to people at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or for whom management of COVID-19 may be particularly complex (including people with complex health needs, disabilities or who live in residential care facilities)

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- whether workers can physically distance from other people

- the remoteness of your workplace and access to health services

- whether your workplace has significant key person dependencies, and capacity to manage high levels of workers absences due to illness

- whether your workers provide essential services with limited workers surge capacity, for example emergency and healthcare services.

People with symptoms

Public Health strongly recommends anyone with acute (or new) respiratory symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat and/or runny nose, to stay at home, even if those symptoms are mild, and get tested for COVID-19. Testing can be by PCR laboratory test or RAT.

If the result is negative and the person still has acute symptoms, they should stay at home and repeat the test in the next 24–48 hours.

If the result is negative the second time, and they still have acute symptoms, they should stay at home until the symptoms resolve completely or there is significant improvement. There are other respiratory viruses, including Influenza viruses, that can cause serious illness in some people, and spread easily from person to person.

Anyone with a fever, who feels unwell or has any increase in symptoms should stay home even if they test negative for COVID-19.

If symptoms have resolved, they can return to work. If some mild symptoms remain, Public Health recommends they wear a facemask when away from home.

If the person has any concerns, or is unsure if their symptoms are improving, Public Health recommends they seek medical advice.

Best practice controls for all workplaces

O Stay informed about COVID-19, Influenza and other disease risks; note Public Health alerts and consider their implications for your workplace and workforce.

O Be aware of Public Health requirements that may apply to your workplace.

O If your workplace has a COVID-19 Safety Plan, update, maintain and use it; include how the workplace will manage workers who are close contacts and the conditions under which they can attend the workplace.

O If your workplace does not have a COVID-19 Safety Plan, document your risk assessment and the controls you will use, and make this information accessible to your workers.

O If your workplace is a high-risk or priority setting for COVID-19, maintain a plan to manage outbreaks.

› High-risk settings are residential care facilities, hospitals, correctional facilities and support schools.

› Priority settings include schools and early childhood education and care services; specialist housing and homeless shelters; food processing, distribution and cold storage facilities; essential services (health, emergency, water, power, electricity and transport services); remote industrial sites with accommodation; and migrant worker accommodation.

O Your workforce is more likely to be COVID-safe if workers are aware of the ongoing risks.

› Remind workers that there are likely to be people within the workplace who are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or Influenza, and of their duty to protect each other, as feasible.

› Keep workers informed about the level of risk and ways to protect themselves and others. Include updates about COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses in workers communications.

› Display COVID-19 safety information.

O Ensure workers are adequately supervised and supported to comply with COVID-19 controls measures in your workplace.

O Strongly recommend workers to stay up to date with COVID-19 and Influenza vaccinations; see *Best Practice Workplace Guidance: Vaccination*.

O Be aware of workers with acute flu-like or respiratory symptoms including cough, sore throat, fatigue and signs of fever. Noticing and acting on signs of illness quickly may help slow the spread of disease in the workplace.

O Have a plan to manage people onsite who become unwell or receive a positive test result. Direct the person to:

› wear a facemask if they are not already doing so

› remain at least 1.5 metres from other people

› go home, preferably by private transport.

O Provide effective ventilation for indoor settings; see *Best Practice Workplace Guidance: Ventilation*.

O Encourage workers to wear facemasks, especially when there is higher risk of exposure (for example, when COVID-19 or Influenza are spreading in the community), they are in contact with people at risk of severe illness or they cannot physically distance; see *Best Practice Workplace Guidance: Facemasks*.

O Minimise density and maximise physical distancing of workers, for example opt for online meetings rather than crowded face-to-face meetings. See *Best Practice Workplace Guidance: Physical Distancing*.

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O   Facilitate and encourage effective and regular hand hygiene (handwashing and use of alcohol-based hand rub), cleaning and disinfection; see *Best Practice Workplace Guidance: Hygiene and Cleaning*.

O   Maintain business continuity plans that cover the risks of infectious illnesses and higher than normal workers absences.

Additional controls may include:

O   having a designated person responsible for best practice COVID-19 safety

O   utilising controls like screens at checkouts, to provide a barrier between customers and service staff.

Risk assessment

People at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 include:

> people who are not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination; these people are most at risk

> people aged over 70 years

> people with certain medical conditions, including heart disease, chronic lung or liver disease, diabetes, poorly controlled high blood pressure, blood cancer, other cancers diagnosed in the past 5 years, and severe obesity

> people having immune suppressive therapy or cancer treatment

> pregnant women.

For detailed information about risk factors for severe illness, go to www.health.gov.au/health-alerts/covid-19/advice-for-groups-at-risk/risk-factors-for-more-serious-illness

Support and further information

• Keep up to date with relevant public health requirements and the Tasmanian Government COVID-19 response at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

• Tasmanian Public Health Best Practice Guidance – set of fact sheets

• Public Health: phone 1800 671 738; email public.health@health.tas.gov.au

• Other infectious disease alerts: www.health.tas.gov.au/news

• WorkSafe Tasmania: www.worksafe.tas.gov.au phone 1300 366 322

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