

COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) IN THE WORKPLACE

13 March 2020

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus is a family of viruses that range in severity from the common cold to severe respiratory illness. COVID-19 is an infectious disease that belongs to this family and was first discovered in December 2019.

Common symptoms of COVID-19 **may** include dry cough, fever, fatigue and body ache. Some people will remain asymptomatic (without any symptoms) despite being infected. At present, the World Health Organisation (WHO) have stated that 80% of people who contract COVID-19 will recover without needing specialised treatment, but approximately 1 in 6 will become seriously ill and develop difficulty with breathing¹.

On 11 March 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic².

The situation pertaining to COVID-19 is evolving and new information is regularly being updated by various authorities. Businesses can access the latest information from these sources listed below. Please note information relating to isolation and quarantine may vary from state to state. Please refer to your relevant state government for relevant information.



Managing COVID-19 in the workplace.

Businesses must identify hazards in the workplace and do what is reasonably practicable to reduce or eliminate such risks.

Coronavirus is a hazard and employers can identify the risks this virus poses to their workers by monitoring expert advice from federal and state health authorities.

Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) must have measures in place to protect the health of all workers.

When determining control measures, the following need to be considered; what the likelihood of the risk occurring is, what will be the degree of harm from the hazard and is the control measure taken reasonably practicable. The [Code of Practice: Managing the work environments facilities](#) serves as a good general guide on this matter³.

It is the PCBU's responsibility to keep up with current COVID-19 advice as it changes.

Some appropriate measures may include (but are not limited to)⁴;

- Ongoing review of government advice relating to COVID-19
- Establishing and adapting organisational policies and procedures
- Ensuring adequate isolation periods are met in accordance with Government regulations
- Informing workers what measures are required should they be exposed or show symptoms of COVID-19
- Minimising, or if possible cancelling, all international travel within the organisation
- Ensuring workers are kept up-to-date with any relevant changes outlined by the Australian or relevant State Government
- Planning for staff absences

¹ Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. 2020. World Health Organization. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>. [Accessed 9 March 2020].

² World Health Organization. 2020. Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19). [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>. [Accessed 13 March 2020].

³ Safe work Australia. 2020. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for PCBUs. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-pcbus>. [Accessed 9 March 2020].

⁴ *ibid*

How can exposure be controlled?

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions⁵:

- Regularly and thoroughly cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze and disposing of the tissue immediately
- Staying home if you feel unwell
- Keeping surfaces clean and dry
- Information on effective hand washing and decreasing the risk of transmission can be found at the WHO link listed below

Overseas travellers

If scheduling any travel overseas, refer to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on the [Smartraveller website](#) for advice.

Is Coronavirus (COVID-19) compensable under Workers Compensation legislation?

Workers' Compensation legislation varies between States and Territories. Very broadly, a worker needs to establish that they suffered an injury or disease; and there must be a causal relationship between the employment and that injury or disease. Each claim will need to be assessed on its unique facts, and in accordance with the relevant legislation for that State or Territory.

KNOW NOW



If you have any further questions, please contact GIO Workers Insurance at riskservices@gio.com.au

Additional Information

Safe Work Australia

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid19-advice-pcbus>

World Health Organisation

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

World Health Organisation - Handwashing

https://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/

Australian Government Department of Health

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

Applicable State Government Health sites:

ACT:

<https://health.act.gov.au/public-health-alert/updated-information-about-covid-19>

NSW:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

NT:

<https://securent.nt.gov.au/alerts/coronavirus-covid-19-updates>

QLD:

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/diseases/coronavirus>

SA:

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/about-sa/government>

TAS:

https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/infectious_diseases/coronavirus

VIC:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

WA:

https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus

⁵ Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. 2020. World Health Organization. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>. [Accessed 9 March 2020].