



Infection prevention and control advice for physical distancing in the workplace

Context

Physical distancing, also known as social distancing, is ensuring there is space between yourself and others. This is an effective way to slow the spread of coronavirus. Physical distancing means where possible:

- allowing 2m² per person in any environment except where exempted under the relevant Direction issued under the Emergency Management Act 2005. Examples of exempt workplaces include: office building, factory, mining site, construction site, schools, public transport or other place of work that is necessary for the normal business of those premises;
- staying at least 1.5 metres away from other people e.g. when exercising, visiting the supermarket or a medical centre;
- limiting the size of gatherings as per the current recommendations; and
- advising against hand shaking and other physical contact.

Other steps everyone can take to reduce the spread of coronavirus include:

- Staying home when unwell;
- Practising good hand hygiene by using soap and running water then drying hands thoroughly or by using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser;
- Practising good cough and sneeze etiquette. If you sneeze or cough into a tissue, dispose of the tissue into a rubbish bin immediately and sanitize your hands. Otherwise coughing or sneezing into your elbow is an appropriate way to reduce the spread of infection;
- Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose and mouth) as much as possible, especially when your hands are not clean.

Should a colleague return a positive result to COVID-19, applying these measures in the workplace may assist in reducing the number of staff required to self-isolate due to being identified as close contacts.

A close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 is required to self-isolate until 14 days after the last close contact with the confirmed case.

A close contact is defined by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia as:

- a person having greater than 15 minutes cumulative, over the course of a week, face-to-face contact in any setting with a confirmed or probable case

or

- sharing a closed space with a confirmed or probable case for a prolonged period i.e. greater than 2 hours in the period extending from 48 hours before the onset of signs and symptoms in the confirmed or probable case.

General workplace management

All workplaces are configured differently and pose unique challenges to social distancing. It is recognised that a workplace or business with staff that are required to self-isolate may create staff shortages which may be damaging to the workplace. Some general actions that may be applied to a variety of workplaces to help achieve social distancing include:

1. Ensure all staff understand the importance of monitoring their own health and direct them to stay at home if they are feeling unwell. If being absent from work risks placing the staff member in financial hardship, information and services for employees and businesses affected by COVID-19 can be found on the [Centrelink website](#).
2. Emphasise the importance of maintaining good hygiene to all staff. Hand washing or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser frequently, avoiding hand shaking, avoid sharing food or drinks and practising good cough and sneeze etiquette i.e. cough or sneeze into your elbow or tissue, dispose of tissue and immediately wash hands, will all help to reduce the spread of disease.
3. Other considerations depend on the size and type of workplace, but may include:
 - rostering considerations: staggering shifts and breaks to limit the amount of contact staff have between each other
 - staff skills mix: try to avoid rostering/allocating all senior staff to the same shift/area.
 - review staff kitchen areas to ensure appropriate cleaning of utensils and crockery and limit the number of people in the kitchen area at any one time
 - staff allocations: try to allocate staff to work with the same staff, in the same area, to avoid the amount of contact between large numbers of staff. This has been described as a staff pod/pool. (e.g. in a kitchen allocate the staff to a particular bench/task each day, in a healthcare facility allocate staff to the same rooms each shift, in a supermarket allocate staff to a particular aisle or checkout)
 - allocating areas for staff to have their tea/meal/rest breaks e.g. staff working together, have the same break time and have a table allocated to them in the tea room.
 - allocating staff change rooms and bathroom facilities
 - allocating dedicated resources and equipment to the same staff to limit sharing of items between employees e.g. tools, kitchen appliances, vehicles
 - limit visitors to the service such as company representatives to avoid staff unnecessarily having to move between areas to facilitate the visit
 - allow fresh air to enter the work area as much as possible
 - emphasize the importance of and provide products for staff to frequently clean commonly touched areas such as work stations, tables, chairs, equipment, door handles and lift buttons
 - try to allow for 1.5 metres between staff as much as possible. For example, in a meeting room or a waiting area space chairs apart or remove every second chair. At desks and work stations space chairs apart or remove chairs to provide adequate space
 - at service counters, tape the floor or provide a barrier to keep people 1.5 metres away from service counter staff
 - facilitate video conferencing for team or business meetings
 - try to encourage staff to arrive/leave enclosed areas in the same order. Such as in a lift or a meeting room. This will help to reduce staff intermingling

- strict application of physical distancing is not a requirement in the use of elevators or lifts as the average time of contact is usually under 15 minutes and is considered being an indoor space used for the purpose of transiting through the space; however, staff should adhere to recommended hygiene practices, physical distancing applied where possible and the overcrowding of lifts should be avoided
- temperature and health checking of staff arriving to work each day is not currently a Department of Health recommendation, however some workplaces have found that this is a helpful way for employers to keep reminding staff of the importance to monitor their own health
- the employer should keep a concise and documented record of staff for each shift, their allocated areas and the steps taken to maintain social distancing. In the event of a staff member returning a positive result to COVID-19, comprehensive record keeping will assist Public Health staff to conduct timely and accurate contact tracing i.e. working out who has been in close contact with the positive case and who has not.

Last updated 5 June 2020

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

© Department of Health 2020 health.wa.gov.au