



## Guidance for the management of COVID-19 in the workplace

Each workplace is responsible for their own preparedness for COVID-19, and for implementing preventative strategies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace.

### Preventing spread of COVID-19 in the workplace

To reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace, employers should implement the following strategies:

- Have a [COVID Safety Plan](#)
- Promote infection prevention and control principles, including:
  - Unwell staff members must not attend work
  - [Good personal hygiene](#) and physical distancing in the workplace, including provision of alcohol-based hand rub (that contains between 60-80% alcohol) or access to soap and water for hand washing
  - [Frequent cleaning and disinfection of the environment](#) with attention paid to shared workspaces, restrooms, staff changing rooms, lift buttons, gym equipment, horizontal surfaces such as tables, chairs and other frequently touched surfaces
  - Follow [advice for use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)
  - Ensure [posters and signage](#) in the workplace with infection control messaging
- Wear [face masks](#) as required under current public health and social measures. Consider wearing masks when physical distancing cannot be practised.
- Promote [COVID-19 vaccination](#) for all eligible staff and contractors.

### Reducing the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace

The following strategies will assist in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace:

- Have a business continuity plan and/or an outbreak management plan and ensure plans for workforce and supplies are in place to respond to an outbreak with limited additional support.
- Review the layout of the built environment and whether it is feasible to reduce shared break areas, avoid car-pooling, identify alternative ways to travel (avoid public transport) or modify the work environment (to maintain physical distancing if possible).
- Think about minimising the risk of exposure by adjusting rosters or zoning floors and having dedicated staff entry and exit points.
- Optimise ventilation in the workplace – see [information on COVID-19 and building ventilation](#) and [information on COVID-19 and air purifiers/cleaners](#).
- Consider work from home policies and limit face-to-face meetings and desk sharing.
- Where working from home arrangements are not possible, consider implementing split shifts to separate the workforce into two or more smaller work streams.
- Review your [PPE stocks](#).
- Think about how workers can access testing, whether by laboratory-based PCR or rapid antigen testing (RAT).
- Be aware of available care pathways for cases and ensure information regarding registration is available for workers (see [WA COVID Care at home](#)).

## Close contacts attending work

### Close contacts with symptoms

Close contacts with symptoms should not attend work. If symptoms develop while at work, they should be advised to return home immediately to isolate and be tested. They should follow the advice [“I am a close contact with symptoms” \(wa.gov.au\)](#).

### Close contacts without symptoms

Close contacts should work from home, where possible. They should follow the advice [“I am a close contact and have no symptoms” \(wa.gov.au\)](#).

Close contacts who do not have symptoms may attend work if they:

- Return a negative RAT result before leaving home each day
- Wear a mask at all times (noting that the usual exemptions apply)
- Avoid high risk settings, including hospitals, healthcare settings, aged care facilities, residential care facilities (including disability care facilities and mental health residential facilities) and correctional facilities.

They are strongly encouraged to:

- Avoid non-essential gatherings and contact with people at risk of severe illness
- Notify their employer, educational facility or early learning centre of their close contact status.

### Close contacts without symptoms who work in a high-risk setting

Relevant workers at high-risk settings (including aged care facilities, residential care facilities such as disability care facilities and mental health residential facilities, health care settings and correctional facilities) are subject to additional obligations if they are to attend work. They must:

- Advise their employer that they are a close contact
- Seek confirmation from their employer to attend work
- Be fully vaccinated
- Monitor for symptoms
- Immediately leave the workplace and return home if they develop symptoms or become COVID-19 positive
- Only enter or remain at the high-risk setting for the purposes of their work duties
- Wear a surgical mask while at work along with any PPE requirements from the employer
- Not share break areas at work with any other person
- Maintain physical distancing of 1.5m from other people in the workplace.

Check the [HealthyWA website](#) for the latest advice on what to do if you are a close contact: [COVID-19 close contacts](#).

## When a staff member develops COVID-19 symptoms

If a staff member develops [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) (such as fever, runny nose, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat or loss of taste and/or smell), they should:

- Get [tested for COVID-19](#), even if symptoms are mild, and isolate at home
- Follow [testing and isolation protocols \(wa.gov.au\)](#) for a person with symptoms
- If their COVID-19 test is positive, they should inform their employer.

## If a COVID-19 positive person attends the workplace

If you are being notified directly by the COVID-19 positive person (e.g. an employee) that they have a positive test result, check that they are isolating at a suitable location.

- If they are not isolating, advise them to stop any work they are doing, wear a mask and return home (or to a suitable location) to isolate immediately, travelling either by private vehicle, taxi or rideshare service.
- They should isolate for a minimum of 7 full days, and follow the advice [“I have tested positive for COVID-19” \(wa.gov.au\)](#).

### Workplaces with a residential setting

Workplaces with a residential setting (for example residential care facilities, boarding schools, camp schools, shared living facilities for staff, maritime vessels, or other accommodation facilities), may identify close contacts (see Box 1) within the workplace, if the case attended work during their infectious period (see Box 2). An example for calculating the infectious period and determining if there are close contacts in the workplace is outlined in Box 3.

Other workplaces are not required to identify close contacts but should implement measures to [reduce the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace](#).

#### Box 1. Close contact

A **close contact** is someone who has had contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 during their infectious period and is:

- A household member and/or intimate partner of the COVID-19 case, or
- Someone who had close personal interaction where they spent 4 hours of cumulative contact with the in a residential setting (including a home, residential care facility, boarding school, camp school, shared living facility for staff, maritime vessel, or other accommodation facility) in any 24-hour period where masks have been removed by both people during the period of contact, or
- Someone who is directed by WA Health that they are a close contact.

#### Box 2. COVID-19 infectious period

The **infectious period** for a COVID-19 positive person is taken from 48 hours before the onset of symptoms (or before their positive test result if they do not have any symptoms) until they finish their [isolation period](#).

#### Box 3. Example for calculating the infectious period and determining if there are close contacts in the workplace

*Employee ‘AB’ has a runny nose and cough when they wake up on Tuesday morning. They have a COVID-19 test on Wednesday morning which returns positive. They worked night shifts on Saturday and Sunday nights in a workplace with a residential setting. Their infectious period would be from Sunday morning (48 hours before symptoms started) until they finish their [isolation period](#). All of their close contacts at the residential component of the workplace from Sunday morning to Wednesday morning (when they started isolating) need to be identified. The workplace will need to identify any people in the residential component of the workplace on the Sunday night shift to let them know they are close contacts.*

Workplaces with a residential setting should:

1. Determine whether the person was in the residential setting of the workplace at any time during the dates of their infectious period. It may help to refer to documents such as rosters, timesheets, records for signing in/out, etc, to determine this.
2. Identify workers, visitors or clients who had potential close contact, as defined in Box 1, with the person during their infectious period. This may involve checking rosters, time sheets, sign-in sheets and visitors logs etc.
3. Maintain records of the contact tracing undertaken. This will be helpful if they be contacted by WA Health (noting that not all workplaces will be contacted by WA Health).
4. Record information in an Excel spreadsheet, where possible, with the following information:
  - Workplace details: including name, address, type of workplace, phone (essential) and email address (if available)
  - Details of person who tested positive to COVID-19: including name, date of birth, phone number, date of positive test, date and time of symptom onset, attendance at work during infectious period
  - Close contacts in the workplace: including names, date of birth, phone number, the location of the exposure, duration of the exposure, whether masks were worn during the exposure, any symptoms they report, and the advice provided to them by the employer.
5. Maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the person who tested positive for COVID-19. Employers must not disclose the identity of the case to other employees, unless the case gives them permission to do so.
6. Notify the close contacts to inform them:
  - Of their close contact status,
  - To follow the advice [“I am a close contact and have no symptoms” or “I am a close contact who develops symptoms” testing and isolation protocol \(wa.gov.au\)](#) as appropriate, and
  - That WA Health *may* be in contact with them for further instructions.
7. Call 13COVID (13 26843) if they have queries relating to contact tracing.

## Return to Work

### Workers who have tested positive to COVID-19

Workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 can return to work when:

- They have completed their [required isolation period](#), and
- Their acute [respiratory symptoms](#) have resolved.

Evidence of a negative test or a clearance certificate is **not** required and are not provided by COVID testing clinics.

Workers also **do not** need to be tested for COVID-19 within the 12 weeks after they have completed their required isolation, including if they have COVID-19 symptoms, are told they are a close contact, or for workplace screening. Workers do not have to quarantine if they meet the close contact definition within this 12-week period. If workers develop symptoms during this 12-week period, they should stay at home until their symptoms have resolved to prevent the spread of other infections. Their general practitioner may suggest testing for other respiratory viruses in this circumstance, such as influenza.

## Workers who are close contacts

Employees who are close contacts and have worked from home or not attended work for 7 days after their COVID-19 exposure can return to work if they have tested negative for COVID-19 by PCR on Day 6 or RAT on Day 7, and they have no symptoms.

## Further information

- [WA COVID-19 TTIQ \(Test, Trace, Isolate and Quarantine\) Plan \(health.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/health-topics/coronavirus/TTIQ)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for employers \(external site\)](#)
- [COVID-19 updates for business \(external site\)](#)
- Signs and posters for the workplace (WA Health):
  - [Stay safe at work posters](#)
  - [How to wash your hands](#)
  - [Protect yourselves and others](#)
  - [Stop the spread](#)
  - [COVID-19 resources for Aboriginal people](#)
  - [COVID-19 translated resources](#)
- [Advice on how to access PPE \(health.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/health-topics/coronavirus/PPE)
- [WA COVID Care at Home \(healthywa.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/HealthyWA/COVID-19-Care-at-Home)

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