



Return to workplace guide for employers.

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Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, organisations need to be able to adapt to changes in the workforce with emphasis on health and safety. Information on how organisations can do this can be found in this guide to support your workforce and maintain operational efficiency.

Organisations play a large role in protecting the health and safety of employees and limiting the impact of a pandemic on our communities and our economy. However, COVID-19 and its implications are changing everyday and can make it difficult for organisations and employees to stay updated on the latest developments.

Through the collation of information from health departments, other organisations, and government departments, this guide provides general advice for businesses and individuals on how to transition back to the workplace, and what their legal responsibilities are.

In this guide you will find information on:

1. Employer obligations
2. Tips on how to manage the return to work process
3. Workplace health and safety
4. Managing and engaging a dispersed workforce
5. The importance of an internal communications plan
6. Supporting employee wellbeing
7. How HR can evolve after COVID-19





BEFORE PUTTING TOGETHER A RETURN TO WORKPLACE STRATEGY, IT IS CRITICAL TO RECOGNISE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AS AN EMPLOYER.

Employer Obligations

The model Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) laws require you to take care of the health, safety, and welfare of your workers. This includes yourself and other staff, contractors, volunteers, and other stakeholders (clients, visitors etc) that visit your workplace. With these groups, you are responsible for:

1. Providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety
2. Providing adequate and accessible facilities for the welfare of workers to carry out their work, and
3. Monitoring the health of workers and the conditions of the workplace for the purpose of preventing illness or injury.

Duty to Employees

You must do what you can to ensure the health and safety of your workers. If reasonably practicable, you must eliminate the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

If you are not able to eliminate the risk of exposure to COVID-19, you must minimise that risk, as far as is reasonably practicable. This could be done by:

1. Continuing/implementing some WFH arrangements
2. Requiring workers to practice physical distancing
3. requiring workers to practice good hygiene (e.g., through workplace policies and ensuring access to adequate and well stocked hygiene facilities)
4. requiring workers to stay home when sick, and
5. cleaning the workplace regularly and thoroughly.

Duty to Other People in the Workplace

You must ensure the work of your business or undertaking does not put the health and safety of other persons (such as customers, clients and visitors) at risk of contracting COVID-19

You must minimise that risk, as far as is reasonably practicable. This could be done by:

1. Requiring them to practice physical distancing, including through contactless deliveries and payments
2. Requiring them to practice good hygiene, and
3. Requiring others to stay away from the workplace, unless essential, e.g., such as family, friends and visitors.

Duty to Maintain the Workplace and Facilities

You must maintain your workplace to ensure the work environment does not put workers and others at risk of contracting COVID-19. This could be done by:

1. Cleaning the workplace regularly and thoroughly
2. Restructuring the layout of the workplace to allow for physical distancing, and
3. Limiting the number of people in the workplace at any given time.

You must also provide the following facilities:

1. Washroom facilities including adequate supply of soap, water and paper towel
2. hand sanitiser, where it is not possible for workers to wash their hands, and
3. staff rooms that are regularly cleaned and allow for physical distancing

Duty to Provide Information, Training, Instruction and Supervision

You must provide your workers with any information or training that is necessary to protect them from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 arising from their work. Information and training may include:

1. Providing guidance on how to properly wash hands
2. Training workers in how to fit and use any necessary personal protective equipment (PPE)
3. Training workers to exercise adequate cleaning practices throughout the day
4. Providing workers with instructions on how to set up a safe home workplace, and
5. Providing workers with instructions on staying home from work if sick.

Duty to Consult

You must consult with workers on WH&S relating to COVID-19. You must take the views of workers into account and advise workers of the outcome of consultation. Consult with workers:

1. when you conduct a risk assessment
2. when you make decisions on control measures to use to manage the risk of exposure to COVID-19
3. when you make decisions about the adequacy of workplace facilities
4. when you propose other changes that may affect the health and safety of workers, and
5. when you change any procedures that have an impact on the WH&S of workers.



Key Tips

- Increase flexibility parameters for employees by adopting remote working as an option for flexibility.
- Implement flexible working arrangements and work hours
- Support the setup of home offices for employees,
- Increase L&D by offering online training based on the interests of employees and organisational best practice
- Increase EAP offer by supporting more sessions and extending offer to employees' families and friends.
- Encourage the use of multiple communications channels such as instant messenger/chat, video conferencing and virtual message boards.

Transitioning Back to the Workplace

Risk Assessment

The risks associated with exposure to COVID-19 vary from business to business. It's recommended before you put together a return to workplace plan, you consult with workers and any WH&S representatives to identify risks and control measures for your workplace.

Phased Roll-out

To minimise risk to staff, consider returning to the workplace in a series of phases with limited groups of employees. If you decide to return to the workplace in phases, it's best to:

1. Set target dates for each transition to work towards
2. Have managers speak to their teams to identify which roles will be included in each transition. This might include considering:
 - Roles that can continue working remotely
 - Roles that are best suited to the workplace
 - Requirements within a team to rotate
 - How individuals will travel to work
3. Consider IT/equipment set up and access
4. Stagger start/finish times. This allows employees to travel to work not during peak hours

Pulse Surveys

Consider running regular company-wide pulse surveys to allow staff to provide feedback on their experience to date, This will allow you to collect genuine insights on employee thoughts and behaviours, and help you design appropriate programs. Ask questions around staff attitudes to remote working, WH&S, and general engagement.



Communication Points

- Actions taken by the business to eliminate and prevent COVID-19 from the workplace
- The importance of social distancing and hygiene best practices
- Symptoms of COVID-19 and reporting instructions
- Other supportive measures i.e. reimbursing home office expenses or EAP offerings
- Updates to policies and procedures

Transitioning Back to the Workplace

Travel

For staff that are required to travel domestically for their role, consider if their meetings can best be done via video. Wherever possible, look to minimise travel and keep open communication with employees to gauge their attitudes.

Workers Rights

Workers are entitled to:

1. elect a health and safety representative (HSR) if they wish to be represented by one
2. request the formation of a health and safety committee
3. cease unsafe work in certain circumstances
4. have health and safety issues at the workplace resolved in accordance with an agreed issue resolution procedure, and
5. not be discriminated against for raising health and safety issues.

➤ Health & Safety Representatives

Your employees can ask you to facilitate the election of one or more HSR's for the workplace. An HSR is elected by a work group and represents the health and safety interests of the work group, You must keep a current list of all HSR's.

➤ Workers Right to Stop Work

If any of your workers have a reasonable concern that they are being exposed to the COVID-19 virus from an immediate or imminent hazard, they have the right to refuse to carry out or stop unsafe work.

The worker must then carry out suitable alternative work, including other tasks they are trained to do, or performing their work from other locations such as working from home.



DURING THIS PERIOD, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT EMPLOYERS SUPPORT THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF THEIR STAFF AND PROVIDE ADEQUATE RESOURCES.

Transitioning Back to the Workplace

Supporting Employee Wellbeing

During challenging periods, it is crucial that additional support from organisations is placed on the wellbeing of their employees. Wellbeing for most organisations includes both physical and mental wellness, therefore there is often value in developing initiatives that support both of these areas.

Organisations can, for example, offer mental wellness programs that give employees access to information and type of care needed to prevent, treat, or management distress and burnout. This can be coupled with access to physical wellness programs in yoga (online interactive class) at home or reimburse a percentage of cost towards training equipment.

Providing Accessible Resources for Employees

It's crucial to ensure that employees are equipped with sufficient tools of trade and resources to minimise any disruptions to regular work routines. Businesses should consider extending resources to give employees more IT support to assist with new ways of working.

Encourage Two-Way Communication

While it's important that businesses are doing what it takes to promote a seamless transition of employees back to the workplace, it is equally important to ensure employees' voices are heard.

It is therefore important that there is a platform where employees can voice concerns and ask questions which will allow the business to collect feedback and better understand the emotional states of employees.

With this information, businesses can build effective action plans to respond quickly to employee concerns and help reduce key-risk areas such as absenteeism and burnout.



Key Tips

- Monitor your employees for symptoms of COVID-19
- Maintain social distancing of 1.5m between people and 4 square metres of space per person
- Establish clear and thorough communication plan
- Provide workers with appropriate PPE
- Ensure workers practice good hygiene

Workplace Health & Safety

Health Monitoring

It's recommended to monitor your employees:

1. If they are experiencing key symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, coughing, sore throat, fatigue, shortness of breath)
2. If they have been, or have potentially been, exposed to a person that has or is suspected to have COVID-19
3. If they have undertaken, or planning to undertake any travel

If workers are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, you must:

1. Isolate – prevent the spread and remove the person from the workplace. If the worker is fit for work, they can work from home
2. Seek Advice – call your state helpline
3. Transport – ensure the employee has transport to their home or medical facility
4. Clean – clean and disinfect all areas the employee has been in contact with.
5. Identify and Inform – consider who the employee has had contact with, and inform those contacts
6. Review – review risk management controls to see if there is improvement.

Physical Distancing

The current advice from the Department of Health is that everyone must keep at least 1.5m from others where possible. In addition, in a given space, there must be a 4 square metres of space per person where possible.

You should consider and make adjustments to the layout of the workplace to enable employees to keep at least 1.5m apart at all times. This could be achieved by:

1. Spreading out furniture or equipment
2. Splitting workers shifts and start/finish times
3. Putting up signs and floor markings around the workplace
4. Setting up new walkways
5. Postpone/cancel non-essential meetings



STAY UP TO DATE
WITH
GOVERNMENT
AND HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
ANNOUNCEMENTS
WHEN
STRUCTURING
WORKPLACE
HEALTH AND
SAFETY POLICY

Workplace Health & Safety

PPE

You must provide workers with appropriate PPE, and information and training on how and why they are required to use it. Depending on your workplace, PPE can include:

1. Masks – P2 or N95
2. Gloves
3. Eye Protection – safety glasses, goggles, or face shield
4. Perspex screens

All workplaces should also be supplied with sufficient levels of hand sanitiser, paper towel, and thermometers.

Workplace Cleaning

A key way you can protect workers and others from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is by implementing appropriate cleaning and disinfecting measures for your workplace.

Cleaning must be undertaken at least once per day. Cleaning should be more frequent if surfaces become visibly dirty, there is a spill, or if they are touched by different people. Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient. Once clean, surfaces can be disinfected.

Hygiene

You must direct your workers and visitors to the workplace to practice good hygiene while at the workplace. Good hygiene requires everyone to wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and drying them with clean paper towel. Good hygiene also requires everyone to:

1. Cover their coughs and sneezes with their elbow or a clean tissue
2. Avoid touching their face or eyes
3. Disposing of tissues
4. Clean and disinfect shared equipment
5. Wash body and clothes everyday
6. Have no intentional physical contact, i.e.; shaking hands



IT'S CRITICAL FOR HR TO USE THIS PERIOD TO ANALYSE EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS WHEN RE-STRATEGISING

What's Next for HR?

Review Technology Needs

COVID-19 has forced many teams to realise the importance of technology. Now is the perfect time to review operations and identify any areas of deficiency, and implement programs that streamline unproductive activities.

Consider technology in areas like:

1. Recruitment and onboarding – systems that reduce employee costs and support remote environments
2. Communication – technology that coordinates responses across teams and geographies
3. WH&S – incident management and reporting

Upskilling Workforce

Skill gaps are a top threat to businesses, and COVID-19 has pushed lots of organisations to quickly redeploy and reskill their talent.

With individuals and teams looking to continue working remotely, and crisis management now becoming a genuine focus of business, organisations should evolve this trend post-Covid and look to reskill their employees.

Adopting Flexible Work

There's no doubt that attitudes towards flexible and remote work has shifted, and workplaces have seen the financial and productivity benefits.

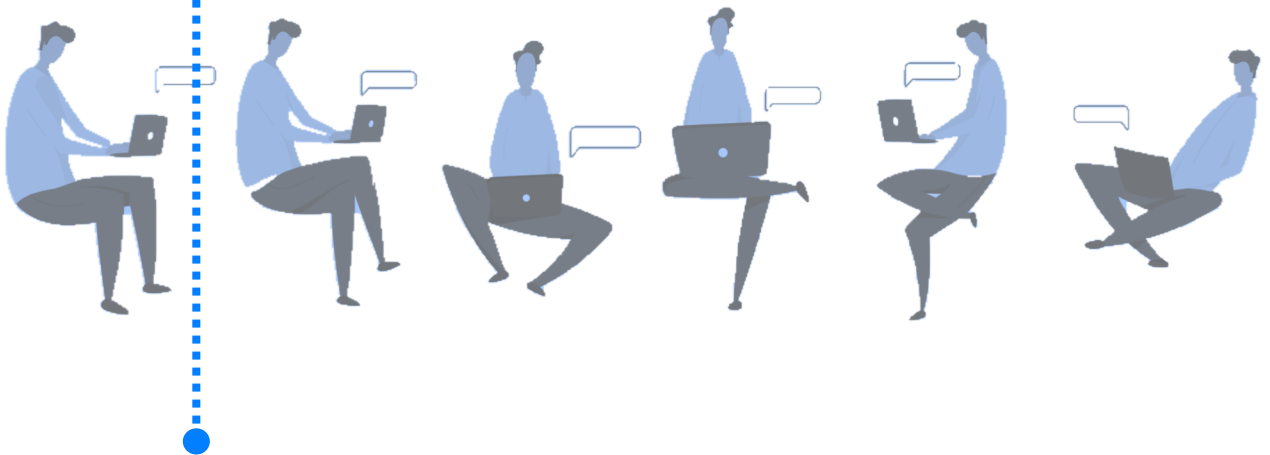
When re-designing your flexible work scheme, it's important to:

1. Measure current state – use surveys to gauge employee attitudes to remote working
2. Analyse productivity – conduct job analysis to measure employee efficiency when working remotely
3. Consult with management – speak with managers to gauge what roles and departments are appropriate for working remotely
4. L&D – analyse current and future training programs so that they meet the demands and complexities of remote working

iCheck.

iCheck is a mobile-friendly, cloud based candidate referencing platform

iCheck set out to solve a significant pain point experienced by HR and Recruitment professionals – the way performance feedback on candidates is collected



iCheck's mission is to help employers make faster, smarter, data-driven decisions

iCheck saves employers time and money to add strategic value to the hiring process, by maximising headcount efficiency and protecting businesses from candidate fraud and breaches of privacy.

For more information about this guide, HR advice, or how iCheck can help your business, email the team at hello@icheck.co

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