

## WHS Requirements

*Consultation under the law is not just talking – it is having workers and HSRs views considered before a decision is made.*

## WORKPLACE ACTION

### COVID-19 is a health and safety risk.

Your Employers has an obligation under WHS law to ensure the health and safety of workers and others. They must have a plan on what will be done to protect and support workers and workers and health and safety representatives (HSRs) must be consulted on this plan.

We know that the best way to protect workers and the public is to make sure to:

1. Identify those who are potentially infected early and support them to isolate whilst waiting for test results
2. Minimise the potential of spread, isolate and support those who are at higher risk for COVID-19. For example, close contact of someone with COVID-19 or someone who has returned from travel in certain locations
3. Quarantine and support those who are infected early until they are healthy and no longer contagious (for at least 14 days).

### WHY IS SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

**It is essential that workers are supported to take the measures necessary to help control the spread of the virus. Workers who are not supported to isolate are at great risk of not identifying themselves. All workers need access to paid special leave and be supported to identify potential exposure and isolate at home.**

### A workplace plan for dealing with COVID-19 must include the following:

- the information, training and support and local measures for infection control including:
  - » appropriate hygiene and PPE
  - » social distancing and isolation, and
  - » work from home arrangement where practicable
  - » how to report any concerns in a way that **encourages workers reporting** and ensures they are **not discriminated against or suffer any adverse consequences**. Supporting workers to take the necessary precautions is essential. Misinformation or the poor or adverse treatment of workers **identifying exposure will increase the risk of spread**

## **Information—to all workers and everyone who is in the workplace,**

1. Provide information and training – clear, concise health information needs to be easily available, in many forms and languages **e.g. posters, leaflets, emails, small video clips.**
2. Work must make it easy for everyone to practice good hygiene
  - a. easy access to water and soap
  - b. easy access to hand sanitisers (60% alcohol)
  - c. easy access to rubbish disposal for tissues, disposable hand towels [hand dryers are not recommended]
  - d. household disinfectant for hard surfaces especially where members public are involved.
3. What to do if a “suspected or confirmed case” has been in the workplace. Contact with a confirmed or suspected case may require people to go into self-isolation and to seek medical assistance. However, casual contact, where there has been less than 15 minutes face-to-face contact or less than 2 hours in a shared closed space with the symptomatic person, will only require them to monitor their health.

## **Information on what to do if people are feeling unwell**

Employers have a duty to monitor conditions at work, this includes making sure people know how to report and what to do if they are feeling unwell.

## **First Aiders and First Aid Kits**

First Aiders are likely to be asked for general health information and should ensure they are practicing infection control measures when giving first aid.

## **Contingency plans**

Preparedness and making information available to everyone improves infection control, decreases stress and anxiety and helps everyone make plans. This will be exceptionally important if health authorities shut down schools, public events, work sites etc.

## **Influenza vaccines**

The risk of COVID-19 will start to coincide with the flu season. There is no vaccine for COVID-19 but there is one for Influenza. Employers need to be making arrangements to provide the flu vaccine free of charge – it is likely to become available during April 2020.

## **Workers and HSRs have rights**

If your employer does not do all of the above, then workers and HSRs need to consider exercising their rights to:

- Get information from the employer and health authorities [Relevant WHS Acts]
- Request review of control measures [Relevant WHS Regs]
- Get outside assistance such as contacting your union [Relevant WHS Act]
- HSRs may consider issue a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) about lack of consultation or effective measures to control COVID-19 in their workplace [Relevant WHS Act]
- Cease work [Relevant WHS Act]
- Participate in Risk assessments to identify what risk is present in each work area/work group and what control measures are reasonable practicable for implementation
  - Risk assess Virus transmission, to ensure workers have access to adequate handwashing facilities, Personal Protective equipment and sanitising equipment as deemed necessary by assessment.