

Model workplace COVID-19 (Omicron) risk assessment

Employers have a duty under the [model Work Health and Safety \(WHS\) laws](#) to eliminate, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risks of COVID-19 at work so far as is reasonably practicable. Employers also have a duty to consult workers (including contractors and labour-hire) and their health and safety representatives, regarding COVID-19 risks and how these risks are to be managed.

Omicron is a highly infectious variant of COVID-19 and employers **must**, in consultation with workers and health and safety representatives (HSRs) identify and assess COVID-19 risks in the workplace and apply and regularly review all reasonably practicable mitigation controls.

Employers must identify and assess risks in consultation with workers and HSRs

Specifically this includes undertaking a [risk assessment](#) which involves:

1. **Identify hazards**—find out what could cause harm.
2. **Assess risks, if necessary**—understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening. This step may not be necessary if you are dealing with a known risk with known controls.
3. **Control risks** – implement the most effective *control measure* that is reasonably practicable in the circumstances and ensure it remains effective over time.
4. **Review hazards** and *control measures* to ensure they are working as planned.

When considering controls you **must** implement **all reasonably practicable controls** that are available. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- facilitating working from home or remote working,
- encouraging [vaccination and boosters](#), where applicable,
- ensuring your workers do not come to work when unwell through the provision of Paid Pandemic Leave (PPL)
- implementing a rapid antigen testing (RAT) program
- wearing masks including improved masks such as P2 or N95
- improving [ventilation](#), where appropriate,
- ensuring physical distancing in the workplace and adhering to density limits (check occupancy limits for the type of building and building standards). For example:
 - supporting some or all workers to work from home or relocating work tasks to different areas of the workplace or off-site,
 - staggering your workers' start, finish and break times (in consultation with workers and their unions),
 - reducing the number of situations where workers come into close contact, for example in lunchrooms and other shared spaces,
- practising good hygiene,
- increasing cleaning and maintenance,

What is reasonably practicable

Employers must do what is [reasonably practicable](#). That means doing everything they reasonably can when it comes to managing COVID-19 risks. In determining what is reasonably practicable they must take into account all relevant matters including:

- **Likelihood of the hazard or risk occurring** – the greater the likelihood of a risk occurring, the greater the significance of this factor when weighing up all matters and determining what is reasonably practicable
- **Degree of harm that might result** from the hazard or risk – the greater the degree of harm that might result from the hazard, the more significant this factor will be when weighing up all matters to determine what is reasonably practicable. Where the degree of harm that might result from the risk or hazard is high, a *control measure* may be reasonably practicable even if the likelihood of the hazard or risk occurring is low.
- **Knowledge** about the hazard or risk, and ways of minimising or eliminating the risk – this must take into account what the duty holder actually knows and what a reasonable person in the duty holder's position would reasonably be expected to know
- **Availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk** – requires consideration of what is available and suitable for the elimination or minimisation of risk, and
- **In relation to costs, there is a clear presumption in favour of safety ahead of costs.** In addition to this, the cost of a control measure must be grossly disproportionate to the risk for the measure not to be reasonably practicable.