



COVID-19 outbreak management principles for office settings

This document provides information on the broad principles of outbreak management as they apply to office settings. The following steps will be undertaken in response to an outbreak (or a single case) in an office setting. Note that these steps may occur in a different order to which they are written and commonly several steps will occur concurrently.

COVID-19 symptoms

If an employee develops symptoms that meet the [testing criteria](#) for COVID-19 while at work, then the employee should be supported to leave work safely. If they are unable to leave immediately, they should be supported to isolate at work, preferably in a separate room. They should wear a mask and remain 1.5m from others.

They should travel by private transport where possible, or by taxi or rideshare if necessary. A mask should be worn. They should not travel by public transport.

They should have a COVID-19 test at an [appropriate venue](#) and self-isolate until the test result is known in line with current state guidelines.

If the employee is too unwell to remain at the facility, consider transfer to hospital. Call 000 and advise that they have possible COVID-19 symptoms.

Employees who are isolating after having undergone testing for COVID-19 should inform their managers as good practice, to enable adequate staffing measures while awaiting their results.

Notification of the case to the workplace

It is a statutory requirement for the testing laboratory to notify the Department of Health urgently if a positive test result is detected.

The Public Health team (within the Department of Health) will immediately contact the affected individual and commence contact tracing to identify other people who may be close contacts.

If the individual confirmed as positive for COVID-19 is employed and was infectious while in the workplace, the Public Health team will contact their employer (after first informing the individual) to discuss implications for the workplace.

At the time of notification to the Department of Health, the employee will usually be at home, as they will be [self-isolating](#) after having a COVID test; the employer will be informed either by the employee or by the Public Health team.

Case management

An employee who is confirmed as a case of COVID-19 infection will need to go into isolation to prevent further spread of the virus to fellow workers, the public or their family. The Public Health team establishes if the case is safe in their home and may put them in touch with support agencies or health professionals to manage their health and social needs.

An employee with COVID-19 can return to work once they are released from isolation, as determined by the Public Health team. The employee will be told by the Public Health team when they are to be [released from isolation](#) (documentation is provided by Public Health).

Contact tracing

All confirmed cases of COVID-19 must be interviewed by a member of the Public Health team to identify all close and casual contacts. This is generally performed via phone call. Employers should work with the Public Health team to identify close contacts in the work setting including providing accurate records of attendance at the workplace. The Public Health team will identify close contacts who need to quarantine and will contact these individuals to provide information and instructions.

Work place management during investigation

An employee, who is confirmed as a case of COVID-19 infection will need to go into isolation to prevent further spread of the virus to fellow workers, their family and the public.

Following initial notification of a case of COVID-19, the Public Health team will undertake a situational analysis and make a risk assessment of the work place. This can often be completed by phone with the business manager, although sometimes a site visit is helpful. The Public Health team provide assistance with decisions about when and if they need to send employees home prior to the end of a work day, and/or if they need to temporarily close the workplace for [cleaning](#), investigation or contact tracing purposes.

Additional case finding

Following the notification of a case of COVID-19 in a workplace, it may be recommended by the Public Health team to test other people in the workplace to determine if they have been infected. The Public Health team will provide advice about this (note: testing of asymptomatic people will require approval by the Chief Health Officer, which will be arranged by the Public Health team if needed).

Management of close contacts

All close contacts will be required to quarantine for 14 days following their last contact with the confirmed case and follow the Public Health team's directions. Testing may be required. Following this period of quarantine, the employee may return to work

Implementation of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures

The Public Health team will provide advice regarding IPC measures and any additional measures that are required at the workplace. The facilities may need to undergo cleaning prior to return of the workforce. Additional signage and/or supportive measures may be recommended to reduce further cases in the workplace.

Provision of information

The Public Health team will provide advice on who needs to be informed about the case or an outbreak. Employees that work in the office setting should be informed and there are factsheets

and information available for them, including in languages other than English. Additional reporting and/or media enquiries can be discussed with the Department of Health Communications team.

Closure or restriction of service

An office may need to close temporarily during contact tracing or to enable full cleaning to take place.

For some offices which are considered higher risk for large or ongoing outbreaks, a very precautionary approach may be taken resulting in a short-term closure or reduction in operations. Businesses may need to close if a large proportion of their workforce is required to quarantine following exposure to a case. Measures such as working from home arrangements, split shifts and/or isolating 'teams' of employees will assist in reducing this outcome.

Further information

Additional information about the principles of outbreak response to COVID-19 can be found in the COVID [CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units](#) or at [Safe Work Australia](#).

Additional information for employers can be found on the [Australian Government health website](#).

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