COVID-19 Safe Workplace Guide

Introduction

Gold Coast Health is committed to taking care of the health and safety of our workers (staff, contractors, volunteers) and others (clients, customers and visitors) in the workplace. All workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment.

The purpose of this document is to assist line managers to implement the physical distancing requirements to provide their staff, patients and visitors with a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guideline should be applied to as far as is reasonably practicable, acknowledging it may be determined following a risk assessment that not all recommended measures can be introduced.

This guideline should be read in conjunction with:
- COVID-19 Safe Workplace Plan
- COVID-19 vulnerable employee guideline; and
- myHR frequently asked questions and tips for COVID-19

Consultation Considerations

Have you put in place measures to both consult and communicate with your staff?

Ensure you are consulting and communicating with workers and relevant Health and Safety Representatives' at every stage of ensuring your COVID-19 Safe Workplace, particularly when determining suitable controls and actions, implementing them and when assessing their effectiveness.

Remember, you have a duty to consult with workers when they are likely to be or are directly affected by a situation involving their health and safety.

Social Distancing – 1 person per 4 square meters

One of the most effective ways to minimise the spread of COVID-19 is to limit the physical proximity between staff and others.

A calculation of each enclosed space will be made by multiplying the length of the space in metres by its width in metres

Kitchens and bathrooms are not excluded from the assessment however need to be individually assessed

FOR EXAMPLE:
Length = 5 metres, Width = 10 metres. Area in square metres: 5 x 10 = 50
Maximum number of people: 50 / 4 = 12.5 Round it down to 12

Remember all general health and safety and ergonomics controls must be maintained when undertaking calculations and where any physical changes may occur.

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Clinical areas where physical distancing cannot be achieved must comply with the infection prevention Standard Precautions including hand hygiene, personal protective equipment and other local protocols

If the calculated number is less than the number of people in the workplace, can the number of people in the enclosed space be reduced by;
- staggering entry into the workplace by patients
  (i.e. queue outside of the enclosed space)
- reducing the number or work tasks in the enclosed space
- postponing non-essential work facilitating working from home
- splitting workers' shifts to reduce the number of workers onsite at any given time
- staggering activities when on shift e.g. staggered clinical times for allied health so that not all are in the office area writing notes at the same time
- restricting access to the enclosed space to essential workers only.

Consultation with staff about changed working arrangements such as roster changes for staggered starts must be undertaken.

Action: Place signage advising the maximum safe occupancy capacity displayed at your work area entrances. This also includes common areas (e.g. lunchrooms) and key people flow areas such as lifts.

Social Distancing-continued

Consider floor signage to direct people flow through public areas to minimise the risk of exposure, particularly in high-traffic area.

Have floor markings placed with at least 1.5m distance between people and keep at least 1.5m spacing between seating in waiting areas.

Note: family groups can sit and queue together, but they are counted individually for the one person per 4 square metre rule.

Identify the situations, tasks and processes where it is reasonably practicable for workers and other to keep 1.5m away from each other

Can the layout of your workplace be changed?

Can the way workers and others interact with each other be modified?

Can physical barriers be used that minimise contact between workers and others e.g. Perspex shield?

Can changes be made to how staff meet, gather and train together?

If face to face training is performed, consider if this can be conducted online

Where face to face training must occur for clinical or essential reasons, consider how physical distancing can be achieved and other hand hygiene and infection prevention measures.
And where necessary contact Work Health and Safety for assistance with a risk assessment

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Action: If your workers are required to transport patients with known or suspected COVID-19, a separate risk assessment must be completed. Contact Work Safety and Safety for assistance.

Close contact work tasks

You may have particular work tasks that, due to the nature of the work, or for work health and safety reasons, can only be performed if workers are in close contact

Consider if the work task is essential

Can stagger start, finish and break times be implemented where appropriate

Can work tasks be moved to different areas of the workplace, or offsite if possible?

Use personal protective equipment where necessary in accordance with Gold Coast Health's guidelines for the assessment of risk and appropriate PPE for surgical patients and management of patients with known or suspected coronavirus.

Hygiene

Have hygiene protocols been implemented in your work area?

Is hand sanitiser and detergent wipes/solution provided in your work area?

Are your staff encouraged to clean tables, desks, workstations, monitors/phones/keyboard and mice? Encourage staff to wipe down their work areas before they commence their shifts

Are there hot desks in your work area? Do these have signs reminding staff to wipe down the desk, phone, keyboard before they start work and when they finish work?

Are the frequently touched surfaces (such as door handles and bathrooms, etc.) cleaned with a detergent solution?

Are hand sanitiser stations available at your work area entry and exit points, and around the workplace with adequate hand wash and paper towel available in rest rooms?

Are there posters providing instruction on hand and respiratory hygiene practices displayed prominently throughout facilities?

Check the cleaning frequency and practices to keep public and common areas safe

Vulnerable staff and pregnant employees

Are there any identified 'vulnerable staff' in your team

Review the COVID-19 Vulnerable Persons information sheet

Talk with your staff about who is considered a 'vulnerable person' and complete the 'Employees in vulnerable groups form' page 9 of the COVID-19 vulnerable employees guideline and send completed form to GCHOHSAdmin@health.qld.gov.au

If you have pregnant employees in your team, refer to the Queensland Health COVID-19 and pregnant staff guideline.

Consider locating "vulnerable staff" who are unable to work from home to other work areas that have more available space (in this instance, other physical distancing measure should have already been attempted)

Communication

Have you put in place measures to communicate regularly with your staff?

Do you remind workers of the need to practice physical distancing?

Do you update staff when controls or actions need to change?

Provide physical distancing markers on the floor in areas where patients line up or where workers perform tasks.

Work Health and Safety

Consider the impact of changed working arrangements in a COVID-19 normal environment on staff fatigue and wellbeing

Ensure staff are taking relevant leave, flex time and have rest and recovery opportunities to rebalance and destress.

Promote uptake and use of the Gold Coast Health Employee Assistance Program.

Staff should feel psychologically safe to also remind colleagues to 'do the right thing' to ensure everyone's health and safety without fear of retribution.

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Where staff actively do not comply to the new local area requirements, they need to be reminded that they have legal obligations under the Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 to follow health and safety directions

Those staff who openly refuse to engage, or return to the workplace, require individual conversations to address concerns. Your Human Resources Business Partner can assist with individual cases.

Other considerations

Can you identify and address, so far as reasonably practicable, any other risks that may arise if workers and other are required to practice physical distancing?

Important note: Health Care Workers will not always be able to maintain physical distancing when providing clinical care e.g. basic nursing care, chest auscultation etc. It is however important that physical distancing also occurs when possible in clinical areas. Patients who require initial and ongoing assessment to establish the presence of epidemiological and clinical risk of influenza like illness (ILI) and those with symptoms, must be managed under contact and droplet precautions in a single room.

Action: If your workers are required to transport patients with known or suspected COVID-19, a separate risk assessment must be completed. Contact Work Safety and Safety for assistance.

This guideline should be applied so far as is reasonably practicable, acknowledging it may be determined following an assessment that not all recommended measures can be introduced. Where recommended measures cannot be introduced, managers are required to document reasons for this and any additional controls that will be put in place

Supporting resources and acknowledgment

- Gold Coast Health would like to thank West Morton Health for sharing their COVID-19 Safe Workplace Resources.
- COVID-19 Staff portal