

Agriculture industry: Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require employers* to take care of the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes:

- > providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety;
- > making sure farm activities don't expose anyone to health and safety risks. That includes your family, other workers, farm visitors and contractors; and
- > adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work.

As an employer, you must identify risks at the workplace, and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks.

Famers and agricultural workers are at risk of exposure to COVID-19

Agricultural workers often work, eat, and sometimes live, in close proximity to each other. This increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. You must do everything reasonably practicable to keep these workers a safe physical distance apart of at least 1.5 metres.

You must implement control measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that other measures to address well known work health and safety risks continue to be implemented. This is the case even if implementing control measures result in delays to your production.

Managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19

Physical distancing

[Physical distancing](#) – keeping everyone at the workplace at least 1.5 metres physically apart – will be challenging in some agricultural workplaces and for some agricultural activities, but it is a key measure to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

- > Limit physical interactions between workers.
 - > Postpone non-essential gatherings or training.



- > Review tasks and processes that usually require close interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between workers where practical and safe to do so.
- > For essential gatherings, conduct in spaces that enable workers to keep the required physical distance of at least 1.5 metres, ideally outdoor spaces.
- > Split workers' shifts.
- > Use methods such as mobile phone or radio to communicate.
- > Reducing the number of workers utilising common areas at a given time (e.g. by staggering meal breaks and start times).
- > Spread out furniture in common areas.
- > Limit worker numbers.
 - > Reduce the number of tasks to be completed each day.
 - > Postpone non-essential work.
- > Place [signage](#) about physical distancing around the workplace.
- > Consider if livestock sale yards and wool auctions can be held online or remotely.

Nominate responsible persons to make sure your workers are following the rules for [physical distancing](#).

If [physical distancing](#) measures introduce new health and safety risks (e.g. because they impact communication), you need to manage those risks too.

The Australian Government Department of Health has a range [of posters and other resources](#) aimed at educating the public about COVID-19. These posters can be placed in client-facing work environments (e.g. workplace entrances, including farm gates).

Health checks and quarantine

Monitor your workers for key symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever.

- > Direct all workers (whether they are at the workplace or not) to report to you if:
 - > they are experiencing any symptoms
 - > they have been, or have potentially been, exposed to a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is suspected to have COVID-19 (even if the person who is suspected to have COVID-19 has not yet been tested), or
 - > they have undertaken, or are planning to undertake, any travel.
- > Encourage workers to report if they observe another worker displaying any symptoms.
- > Stop workers working if they are displaying symptoms.
- > Stop workers who have contracted COVID-19 from returning to the workplace until they provide evidence they are clear of the virus.
- > For those who provide accommodation for workers:
 - > Check the temperature of your workers regularly.
 - > Designate areas for quarantine and medical treatment of workers displaying symptoms. Consider evacuating such workers from the site altogether.
 - > Designate areas for quarantine of workers who report being a close contact of a diagnosed case of COVID-19.
 - > Stop workers travelling to local communities during their time off.

Hygiene

Environmental cleaning

The amount of time COVID-19 survives on objects and surfaces will vary. Environmental cleaning is one way to remove COVID-19 particles.

Usual cleaning schedules will need to be increased.

- > Frequently touched surfaces, including handrails and doors, should be cleaned and disinfected frequently using appropriate detergent or disinfectant solutions.
- > Personal items used in the workplace such as glasses and phones should be cleansed and disinfected frequently (e.g. by using isopropyl alcohol wipes).
- > Workplace amenities including kitchens, lunch rooms, common areas, change rooms, toilets, showers, drink fountains and vending machines, should be cleaned industrially and the frequency of this cleaning should increase.

Also consider reducing the number of touch points for workers. For example, leaving access doors open, where appropriate.

Workers should be provided with cleaning agents and trained to clean down and disinfect plant or equipment (e.g. farm machinery or tools) immediately after use. Workers should each be provided with their own equipment if possible.

To minimise the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus the person cleaning should wear gloves and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves. Gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be made available throughout the workplace.

The workplace should provide closed bins for workers to hygienically dispose of waste and rubbish such as used tissues, immediately (or if away from amenities, as soon as possible) after use. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be available for workers to use after they dispose of their waste.

Workplaces should consider limiting or reducing recirculated air-conditioning in common areas.

See the Department of Health information sheet on [Environmental cleaning and disinfection-principles for COVID-19](#) for further information.

Worker hygiene

Workers should be required to practice [good hygiene](#). This includes:

- > covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
- > disposing of tissues properly
- > washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- > using alcohol-based hand sanitisers with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient
- > cleaning and disinfecting surfaces
- > washing body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day
- > staying more than 1.5 metres away from others, and
- > reporting and staying home if experiencing any symptoms.

In addition, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, workers should also:

- > avoid touching their face
- > avoid handshakes or any other close physical contact
- > refrain from spitting at all times, and
- > put cigarette butts in the bin.

Washroom facilities should have adequate supplies for [good hygiene](#), such as adequate supply of soap, water and toilet paper. Washroom facilities must be kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order.

Workplaces should also be well stocked with alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

To enhance worker hygiene standards, you should also:

- > adequately delineate between work and common areas. This could include reminding workers (with [posters](#) or through training) to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or sanitise their hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before entering and exiting a common area.
- > inform workers of workplace etiquette and standards that are expected when utilising these common areas (cleaning up after yourself, placing rubbish in bins provided, avoiding putting items such as phones on meal surfaces etc.)

Deliveries and other contractors attending the workplace

Non-essential visits to the workplace should be cancelled or postponed.

Deliveries and other contractors who need to attend the workplace should be given clear instructions of your requirements while they are on site.

Minimise the number of workers attending to deliveries and contractors as much as possible. Make alcohol-based hand sanitiser available for workers after physically handling deliveries.

Direct visiting truck drivers to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods such as mobile phones to communicate with your workers wherever possible.

Use, and ask deliveries and contractors to use, electronic paper work where possible, to minimise physical interaction. Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. For instance, see whether a confirmation email or a photo of the loaded or unloaded goods can be accepted as proof of delivery or collection (as applicable).

Keep workers informed

You should provide all workers information about the risks of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Where required, workers should be trained in infection control.

The Australian Government Department of Health has a range [of posters and other resources](#) aimed at educating the public about COVID-19.

Consultation and communicating with workers

You must consult with workers on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19. Allow workers to express views before you make decisions.

Workers are most likely to know about the risks of their work. Involving them will help build worker commitment to this process and any changes.

The [model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#) can give you more information about your duties to consult.

Communicate clearly with workers about control measures. Provide clear direction and guidance about what is expected of workers.

Workers should know:

- > when to stay away from the workplace
- > what action to take if they become unwell
- > what symptoms to be concerned about.

Remind workers they have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and to not adversely affect the health and safety of others.

Provide workers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns, and access to support services, including employee assistance programs.

Interstate workers

Some states and territories have largely closed their borders, requiring people arriving from interstate to self-quarantine for at least 14 days. However, there are some exemptions, including services that support agriculture.

You should stay up to date on the latest travel restrictions and requirements from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and provide that information to your workers.

What else can I do?

Keep your knowledge of the COVID-19 situation up-to-date. Follow advice from authoritative sources such as the Australian Government Department of Health and check daily for any updates to safety advice.

Understand your business and its WHS hazards and risks. It may not be possible because of the work you do to facilitate all workers to work from home, but there are many steps you can take to minimise the risks in your workplace.

Make sure your premises are properly resourced to manage WHS risks during the COVID-19 outbreak, and check that the resources are being used.

Review your policies, procedures and reporting process to ensure they remain current for any incidents, hazards and other WHS issues that arise during this time. Update these materials if necessary.

Ensure these are communicated clearly and processes are being followed.

Consult with workers and ensure there is a means for them to raise any concerns about the steps you are taking to manage the risks.

Further information and Resources

SWA materials

- > [Model Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- > [Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#)
- > For general advice for employers on managing risks to exposure to the COVID-19 virus, go to [COVID-19 Information for workplaces](#)

Other useful resources

- > [Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice](#)
- > [Victorian Farmers Federation: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information](#)
- > [NSW Farmers Association: Emergency COVID 19 Information](#)
- > [WA Farmers: COVID-19 information](#)
- > [Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association: COVID-19](#)
- > [Primary Industries and Regions SA: COVID-19 and primary industries](#)
- > [Dairy Industry COVID-19 \(Novel Coronavirus\) Directory](#)

Support resources

- > [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- > [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
- > [Australian Tax Office – COVID-19: information for small business](#)
- > Australian Government Coronavirus app ([Apple App Store](#), [Google Play](#))
- > [World Health Organisation – Advice for workplaces](#)

Support services

- > [Call the Farmer Assistance Hotline 13 23 16 \(Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm local time\).](#)
- > [Find local support and information on programs and services available:](#)
- > [Family and mental health support — Department of Social Services.](#)
- > [Payments and services for rural Australians — Department of Human Services.](#)
- > [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)

*Please note. To ensure this webpage is accessible and easy to understand, it talks about employer responsibilities. Under the model WHS laws, duties apply to a broader range of people than just employers. Any person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) is covered by the model WHS laws.

For more information see the [Interpretive Guideline – model Work Health and Safety Act – the meaning of ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’](#).