Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19: Retail work

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

> providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety; and
> providing adequate facilities for staff to carry out their work.

Employers must identify risks at the workplace, and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks.

> If your business has been determined an essential service by government and you are permitted to continue operating, you must ensure any risks to your workers are eliminated or minimised as much as is reasonably practicable.

Managing the risks of exposure to the COVID-19 virus

Physical distancing

One of the most effective ways to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus is to limit physical proximity between workers and others. To encourage physical distancing you can do the following:

> calculate the area of your retail floor space and set an upper limit on the number of customers or others who may be inside your premises at any one time in order to keep the minimum 1.5mtrs apart as far as possible (don't forget to count your workers)
> create floor markings that provide minimum guide distances between customers queuing for service and using physical barriers where possible
> use separate doors for entry and exit, if practicable, to avoid contact between people
> if you are set-up for online trade, take extra steps to promote this offering over face to face service
> facilitate working from home arrangements for staff where possible (e.g. book keeper)
> rotate tasks to ensure no one worker has all the contact with customers.
> ensure staff or breakrooms allow for physical distancing, and if not, close them to workers and arrange another suitable space.
> request contactless payment if possible, over cash
> place signage about physical distancing around your premises where you can.

Hygiene

Environmental cleaning

The amount of time the COVID-19 virus survives on inanimate objects and surfaces will vary. Environmental cleaning is one way to remove the virus that causes COVID-19. Employers should ensure:

> they provide surface wipes to clean counters, and equipment such as till, phones, keyboards and eftpos facilities
> that frequently touched surfaces such as doors, handrails, windows and products are cleaned and disinfected frequently using appropriate detergent and disinfectant solutions
> that trollies and hand baskets are whiped clean with surface wipes after each use
> that customers are requested to only touch items they are interested in purchasing, and
> that people cleaning the workplace wear gloves and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves.

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, including:

> frequent hand washing
> limiting contact with others, including through shaking hands
> covering their mouths while coughing or sneezing.

Washroom facilities for workers should have adequate facilities for good hygiene such as adequate supply of soap, water and toilet paper. These must be kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order. Supplies of hand sanitiser should be provided around the office space, where possible.

Workers should also be informed about the risk of exposure and good hygiene through increased signage and information. 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.

General advice for workers, customers and others

> Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose with unwashed (or gloved) hands.
> Clean your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water, or alcohol-based hand rub.
> Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or a flexed elbow. Put tissues in the bin.
> Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.
> Social distancing- maintain a 1.5 metre distance to others (two arms length).
> Stay home if you are sick.
> Seek medical advice if you have a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath (call your doctor or healthdirect on 1800 022 222).

Consultation and communicating with workers

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

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

The model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination can provide more information about your duties to consult.

You need to 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.

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 an office environment.
> 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 all that 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

> For general advice for employers on managing risks to exposure to the COVID-19 virus, go to COVID-19 Information for workplaces.
> For further information on risk management, see the model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks.
> For limits on public gatherings and definitions of essential activities, see the Department of Health - Limits on public gatherings for coronavirus (COVID-19).
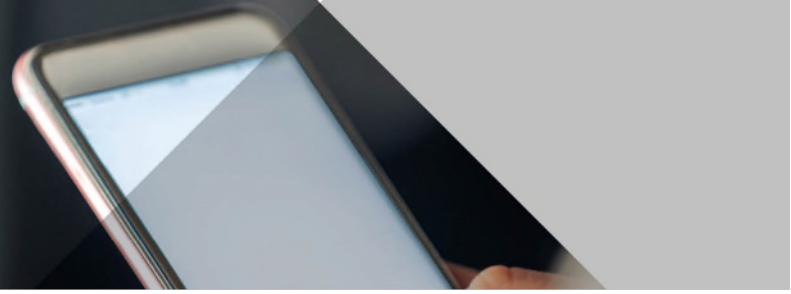
Other resources

> [Fair Work Ombudsman – Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
> [Australian Government Treasury – Support for Businesses](#)
> [Australian Taxation Office – COVID-19: information for small business](#)
> [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)