

WORKPLACE COVID-INQUIRY

If you reasonably suspect someone could have COVID-19, or has been exposed, this creates a health risk in the workplace. This guidance material provides insights for undertaking a workplace COVID-Inquiry to enable workplaces to respond in a timely manner, reducing the risk of further transmission and to support Contact Tracing.

COVID-19 at the workplace

When it comes to managing the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace, the Australian Institute of Health & Safety (AIHS) recommends implementing a precautionary approach. This includes assessing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and the services or activities performed by workers. The assessment should determine the controls you will implement to reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable – that sets your 'Precautionary Approach'.

As we have experienced, COVID-19 is highly contagious and for workplaces operating in areas where there is elevated or high levels of COVID-19 community transmission, sometimes the implemented controls are not enough. Where you reasonably suspect someone in, or has recently at the workplace could have COVID-19 there are basic steps which should be followed. These steps, [What to do if a worker has COVID-19](#) are provided by Safe Work Australia and outline what actions should be taken if there has been an exposure within a workplace.

This guidance material provides supplementary information to the IDENTIFY & INFORM steps, to assist workplaces in taking a precautionary approach when there is a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace. The following steps have been developed from insights provided from AIHS members who have developed processes in their respective organisations to undertake a workplace COVID-Inquiry. The steps are provided to enable workplaces to respond to a suspected case in a timely manner, to reduce the risk of further transmission and to support Contract Tracing Activities. The following steps are not to replace or circumvent contact tracing nor are they to diagnose infection.

Conducting a Workplace COVID-Inquiry

1. Designate an Inquirer



Nominate a person 'Inquirer' to conduct the workplace COVID-Inquiry. In a small or medium sized business this may be a manager. Where resources are available, an occupational health and safety professional or other suitably qualified allied health professional is recommended.

2. Close Contact Identification



The Inquirer should undertake preliminary investigation to identify *likely* close contacts. A close contact is defined by the [Communicable Disease Network Australia](#) as someone who has had:

- Face-to-face contact in any setting with a confirmed or probable case, for greater than 15 minutes cumulative over the course of a week, in the period extending from 48 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed or probable case.
- Sharing of a closed space with a confirmed or probable case for a prolonged period (e.g. More than 2 hours) in the period extending from 48 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed or probable case.

3. Care Conversation



Once the worker has been safely transported home (within 24 hours), the Inquirer should contact the worker for a care conversation to discuss:

- Support services available and accessible to the affected worker whilst away from the workplace and a communication schedule when the team will check in on the employee.
- The period in which the worker was within the workplace - extending from 48 hours before the onset of symptoms.
- If there are any other workers who may have had contact with them that could be deemed as a close contact e.g. fellow workers in a shared office or vehicle.
- Using prompts, and open questions to help identify those employees within the workplace that the affected employee.

4. Collect & Confirm Information



Following the preliminary investigation and care conversation, the Inquirer should collect other information which may support the close contact identification process such as: rosters, break scheduling, site access card data, proximity recording technology, site entry records, CCTV and visitors' registers. Use this information to identify who may meet the definition of a close contact with the affected worker.

Review the workplace information against the affected worker's statements from the preliminary investigation and care conversation. Create a list of employees or others who likely meet the definition of a close contact. Where appropriate, a separate employee should review the list of likely close contacts against the full suite of information to validate the robustness of the process. This could be a Health and Safety Representative.

5. Precautionary Action



Once this list of likely close contacts has been identified and confirmed, a private discussion should occur with each worker outlining that they may have likely been exposed under the definition of a close contact. As a precautionary action, the organisation should then support these likely close contacts to remain away from the workplace until such time that they are contacted by the State/Territory Health Department Contact Tracing Units with further information. Including providing the worker with the local fact sheet which provides guidelines and FAQs for close contacts. The NSW example of the fact sheet can be located online [here](#).

IMPORTANT: A workplace cannot determine a worker to be a close contact. This determination can only be made by a State or Territory Health Department.

The Inquirer should contact the State or Territory Health Department and when requested outline to the contact tracing unit the names and contact details of *likely* close contacts who have been identified and supported to remain away from the workplace.

REMEMBER

To consult with workers and allow them to raise concerns. Comply with your privacy obligations - guidance from the [OAIC](#) and follow the advice of health officials at all times.

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