



COVID-19 outbreak management principles for industrial facilities

Principles of outbreak management and response in an industrial facility

This document provides information on the broad principles of outbreak management as they apply to industry settings thought to be at higher risk of outbreaks of COVID-19.

An 'industrial facility' includes, but is not limited to, warehouses and buildings used by abattoirs, manufacturers, importers, exporters, wholesalers, transport businesses, food processing plants, distribution centres, and customs. These facilities may provide wholesale point of sale functions and often have a concentration of workers that have workstations close by or high instances of repetitive, close interactions over the course of a day such as meal rooms and locker rooms.

The following steps will be undertaken in response to an outbreak (or a single case) in an industrial facility. Note that these steps may occur in a different order to which they are written and commonly several steps will occur concurrently. Industry employers should also refer to separate, industry specific advice (such as "[Food safety and COVID-19](#)") about practices and principles for reducing the risk of COVID-19 impacts in their work place. Adherence to such advice is also likely to influence outbreak management and response requirements.

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 individual and commence the interview process and contact tracing to identify other people who may be close contacts.

If the individual confirmed as positive for COVID-19 is a staff member of 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 is likely to be at home, as they are likely to be [self-isolating](#) after having a COVID test; the employer will be informed either by the employee or by the Public Health team with the knowledge of the employee.

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](#) (clearance testing is not usually recommended or required).

Contact tracing

All confirmed cases of COVID-19 must be interviewed by a member of the Public Health team to identify all close contacts. This is generally performed via phone call. Employers should work with the Public Health team to identify close contacts in the workplace including providing accurate records of attendance at the facility. 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

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 will assist the employer with decisions about when and if they need to send staff home prior to the end of a shift, and/or if they need to temporarily close the facility 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

The Public Health team will work with the business manager to identify all close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in their workforce.

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, including getting tested. 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 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 has factsheets and information available including in languages other than English and for varying literacy levels. The Public Health team will provide advice on who needs to be informed about the case or an outbreak. Additional reporting and/or media can be discussed with Department of Health Communications team.

Shut downs

It is recognised that closure of a food processing establishment or other business may have significant effects on the business and its employees. A temporary lockdown of the facility may be required, particularly where contact tracing is difficult or complex. A period of restriction of services may be needed to allow all close contacts to be identified and managed.

Similarly, a business may need to close temporarily for full cleaning to take place.

For some businesses 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 to split shifts and/or isolate 'teams' of employees may assist in limiting the extent of a prolonged closure.

To limit the number of close contacts identified in the workforce, the industrial facility must be able to demonstrate adequate procedures and processes are in place to manage employee behaviour and/or demonstrate adequate separation of staff such that some staff would not have been exposed to a case in the facility.

It is noted that a full shutdown of food processing business may pose a risk to food security and have animal welfare consequences.

Additional information about the principles of outbreak response to COVID-19 can be found in the COVID [CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units](#). Information specifically for the meat and poultry processing industry can be found on the [Worksafe Victoria website](#).

Additional information for employers can be found on the [WA health website](#). Please find additional easy-read resources for people with disability on the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#).

Last updated 24 July 2021 PHEOC PLN

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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