



COVID-19: Relaxing restrictions and bringing workers back into the community services sector

On 10 May 2020, the State Government released a four-phase roadmap to carefully ease COVID-19 restrictions.

Phase 2 of the roadmap commenced on Monday, 18 May 2020 and Western Australians have been encouraged to return to work unless they are unwell or vulnerable. This phase will include a return to the workplace for many community services sector employees currently working from home, as well as a large number of volunteers.

COVID Safety Guidelines and Safety Plans

The State Government is requiring all businesses to mitigate the risks of COVID-19. Some businesses that were required to close under the directions of the *Emergency Management Act* are now able to re-open but they are required to:

- ensure a maximum of 20 people per venue (excluding staff)
- comply with conditions outlined in the [COVID Safety Guidelines](#)
- complete a [COVID Safety Plan](#)
- display a COVID Safety Plan Certificate in a visible location on the premises
- maintain a minimum of 4 square metres per person
- maintain hygiene and frequent cleaning
- maintain attendance records of patrons for contact tracing
- carefully manage waiting areas to ensure social distancing.

The requirement for businesses to develop COVID Safety Plans prior to re-opening **does not apply** to community services that have remained open (or delivered modified services) while restrictions have been in place. The above requirements represent good practice for any organisation, however and community services are encouraged to consider the COVID Safety Guidelines and make use of the COVID Safety Plan template. Completing a COVID Safety Plan is a good way to demonstrate that you can meet safety requirements and that you aren't putting the community at risk.

The COVID Safety Guidelines include a checklist of items to consider when reopening a business which can be applied to workplaces more generally. It is important that organisations continue or consider:



- implementing enhanced cleaning schedules
- configuring desks and structure usage of bathrooms, lifts, and communal kitchens which enable social distancing to be observed
- installing semi-permanent protective equipment where appropriate, such as clear screens in customer service areas
- staggering start and finish times to assist social distancing on public transport
- encouraging all unwell employees and volunteers to stay away from the workplace
- communicating clear infection control and reporting mechanisms where a diagnosed COVID-19 case has been identified
- Providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as appropriate.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Department of Finance released the EOI process regarding personal protective equipment (PPE), with information on PPE for community sector staff. The bulletin covers who is eligible for PPE, how to access it and how to manage urgent needs. More information can be found in the [FaCS May 2020 Special Edition Bulletin](#).

Services requiring urgent PPE are encouraged to contact the State Health Incident Coordinator at shicc.covidoperations@health.wa.gov.au or 9222 2017.

The Department of Health has also issued [guidelines](#) developed by Infection Prevention and Control experts, that provide comprehensive assurance to service providers as to when PPE should be used in the delivery of community services.

Some further considerations

Community sector Boards and CEOs that are going to be moving back to business as usual need a plan that maintains safety, manages resources and instills confidence. Below are a few additional considerations to ensure a successful transition back to work.

Leading and communicating change

- Can we repurpose the resources that were used for our crisis response into supporting the return to work efforts?
- Do we have the information needed to support our decision-making?
- Do we have a communications and engagement plan that addresses both returning workers and workers who are remaining remote?
- Do we have a plan for training on any new policies, processes and operational procedures during the transition and beyond?
- Do we have a communications plan that delivers the right messages to our stakeholders and clients?



Managing health and safety

- Do we have adequate hygiene protocols and more stringent regular cleaning?
- Do we have guidelines for physical distancing and PPE use?
- Have we, or can we, secure safety equipment (like face masks) for use by employees?
- Do we have visitor and client protocols and screening processes?
- Do we have contingency plans in place should there be a significant spike in COVID-19 cases during the return transition period?
- Do we have a risk management process in place to cover worker and volunteer re-entry and to account for new risks?
- Can we separate teams through parallel scheduling, shift work or staggering work hours to minimise risk of infection?

Looking after people

- How will we deal with employees' individual situations and comfort levels, including underlying health issues, child-care etc.?
- Do we have a policy for employees who do not feel comfortable returning to the workplace?
- Do we need to change policies and productivity expectations to allow for more frequent cleaning of work equipment, breaks for hand-washing or other safety protocols?
- Will we have a plan and policies to address mental and emotional health and stress levels as our people begin to come back to the workplace?

Changing facilities and technology

- Do we have a plan to remodel our office or other workspaces to limit close contact between employees/volunteers?
- Can we manage traffic flow into and out of the workplace in a responsible way?
- What is our plan for redesigning work spaces, and how quickly can we do this?
- Have we appropriately invested in the tools and infrastructure that will continue to enable working remotely?
- Have we developed appropriate mechanisms to control the flow of people, including different start times?
- Do we need to reopen all facilities at once, or can we develop a staggered plan?

Access [current information and resources](#) for Western Australians, including information on the state's roadmap. [Safe Work Australia](#) has developed a range of fact sheets which include resources for organisations to download and display in their workplaces, with checklists, infographics and posters on handwashing, hygiene and physical distancing.

The Department of Communities will continue to work with the community services Peaks Forum members on ongoing advice for specific sectors as the recovery phase is implemented.