

# Keeping your workplace COVIDSafe

A guide for workers in Victoria



### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

Victorian Trades Hall Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung of the mighty Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we live, meet and work. This land was stolen and never ceded, always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

### **ABOUT VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL (VTHC)**

VTHC is the peak body representing workers and unions across Victoria. We represent over 430,000 workers and 40 affiliated unions, covering all sectors of the economy, both public and private.



### **VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL**

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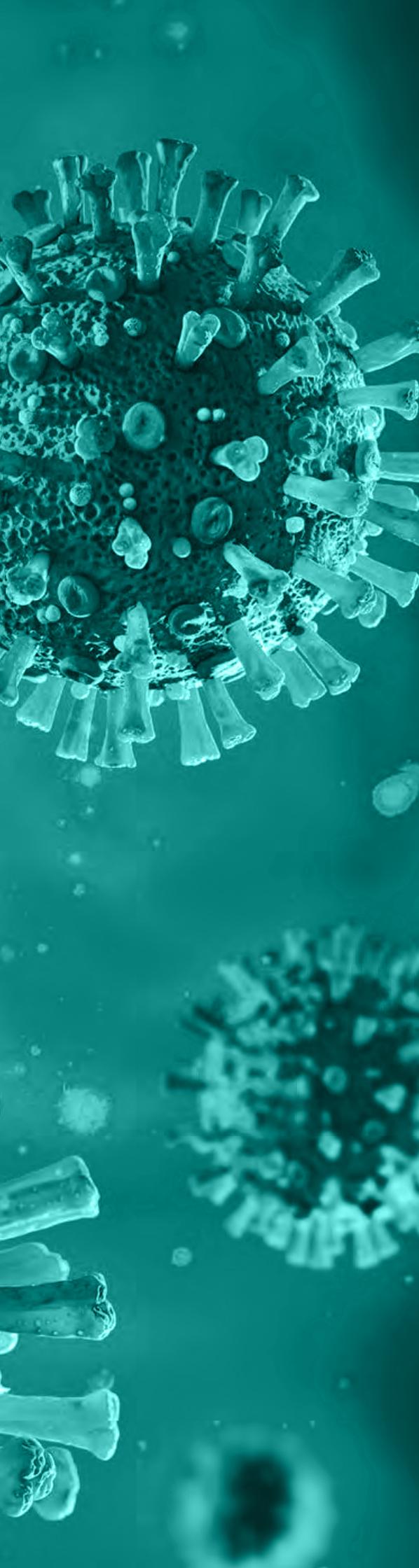
Phone: (03) 9659 3511 Email: [info@vthc.org.au](mailto:info@vthc.org.au)  
[www.ohsrep.org.au](http://www.ohsrep.org.au) [covidsafeworkplace.org](http://covidsafeworkplace.org)

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## Key Contacts

[COVID Safe workplaces typeform request](#)  
Police: 131 444 or [click here to report online](#)  
COVID Hotline: 1800 675 398



# Introduction

In 2020 Australia was saved from the worst of the pandemic that ravaged other countries around the world. However, after the arrival of the Delta variant, and in light of further outbreaks in our community, Victoria is preparing to open up with COVID-19 in our community to stay.

Our collective responsibility is to follow the advice of medical professionals and comply with any government public health orders as we interact with our workmates and the broader community.

By slowing down the spread of the virus we give the maximum number of people possible the opportunity to get fully vaccinated, prevent our health system from being overwhelmed, and minimise the number of people who end up seriously ill or dead.

This guide provides HSRs and union members with some advice on a number of workplace issues related to COVID-19 and returning to work. Don't expect to be an expert. Your role is to be able to pick up any issues and take these to your employer. Where necessary, feel free to seek more advice - from your union or from the VTHC OHS Unit.

# Consultation

Your Employer must consult with you directly, or through your HSRs, about the steps they intend or have taken to make sure your worksafe is as safe as reasonably practicable.

They need to provide you with information, give you an opportunity to share your views and consider that feedback when identifying and assessing hazards and risks, developing and implementing controls, and proposing to make changes - in all cases, before finalising any decisions.

The following chapters cover a number of topics and canvases a range of different steps and recommendations that require consultation with workers before they are implemented.

A failure to consult may be a breach of the OHS Act so if you feel that COVID measures are being rammed through without engaging and consulting with workers make sure you raise it with your HSRs and your Union.

## More information:

- [Trades Hall advice on the duty to consult](#)
- [Worksafe Consultation Guide](#)



# Vaccinations

Getting vaccinated is an act of solidarity. Having a critical mass of the population vaccinated slows the spread of the virus and dramatically lowers the hospitalisation and mortality rates from COVID, preventing our health system from being overwhelmed.

There has been a lot of concern and misinformation circulating amongst the community. The three vaccines which have so far been approved by the TGA - Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna - have been extensively tested and are safe and effective. It is important to recognise that while there are very rare adverse outcomes from the vaccines, the costs of not vaccinating against COVID in terms of serious illness and death are much, much greater.

Workplaces have been major sites of COVID transmission in Victoria. Workers in some industries, for example aged care, construction and freight are already required by public health orders to be vaccinated for their work. It is likely this list

of occupations will grow with the Government suggesting that workers in healthcare, schools/education, childcare, police and disability also require vaccinations to work. .

In other sectors individual employers are making vaccinations a requirement to work, sometimes in consultation with unions and HSRs, sometimes not, claiming that this is a necessary control to ensure, as far as is possible, a safe working environment.

The requirement to be vaccinated for work involves a number of different areas of law, including OHS, employment and discrimination law. Whether or not such a direction is lawful and reasonable will depend on the factors at the individual workplace, the situation in the wider community and employees' individual circumstances. Depending on the employer and the type of work, the failure to get a vaccination may result in workers continuing to work from home, found suitable

alternative work, being stood down or even dismissed.

The first step to any employer introducing a requirement for employees to get vaccinated for work must be to consult with affected workers and their HSR/s. You can request that your Union be involved in these discussions.

Victorian unions strongly encourage all workers to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their families, and their work colleagues. If you have questions about vaccination, you can visit [ohsrep.org.au/ask\\_renata](https://ohsrep.org.au/ask_renata)

## More information

- [Victorian Trades Hall vaccine advice](#)
- [The requirement to be vaccinated for work by public health direction](#)
- [The requirement to be vaccinated for work by direction or employer](#)
- [About talking to people hesitant to get vaccinated](#)



# Workplace Based Controls

## COVID Safe Plan

It is mandatory for every Victorian business with on-site operations to have a COVIDSafe Plan. This COVIDSafe Plan must be developed in consultation with employees and any relevant Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs).

Employers must review and update their COVIDSafe Plans regularly, especially when restrictions or public health

advice changes. This must be done in consultation with workers and HSRs. You can download our COVIDSafe Checklist to see whether your workplace is COVIDSafe.

There are a number of industries, for example meat processing and abattoirs, hospitals, schools, and many more, have additional obligations and restrictions, which must be included in the

COVIDSafe Plan.

If you're concerned about an immediate & serious breach of COVID Safe guidelines call the police on 131 444 or click [here](#) to report online.

### More information:

- [COVIDSafe Checklist](#)
- [COVIDSafe Plan](#)
- [Additional Industry Obligations](#)



## QR Code Check In

Record keeping is a crucial part in contact tracing and limiting the spread of COVID-19. All workplaces, with very limited exceptions, must require all employees and visitors to check in using the Service Victoria QR Code app.

Workplaces must use an alternative record keeping system (such as pen and paper) when it is not practicable for a person to record their attendance using a QR code service. Businesses may be issued on the spot

fines or prosecuted in court for non-compliance.

### More information:

- Check in with QR codes using the Service Victoria app

## Face Masks

Face masks are an important measure to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community and in workplaces. The risk of transmission is highest where people are close to each other, and in enclosed spaces.

Face masks need to be fitted to cover the nose and mouth. Lawful exceptions may apply for some employees who experience problems with breathing, a serious condition of the face, a disability or a mental health condition.

It is expected that appropriate masks be provided by the employer.

### More information:

- [Face masks at work](#)

## Physical Distancing & Density Requirements

Wherever possible within the workplace, employees and visitors must maintain physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres apart.

Employers must apply the relevant density limits, as

declared from time to time by the Government, to shared work areas and publicly accessible spaces and have signage to indicate these limits at the entrance of enclosed areas. It's also encouraged to consider using floor markings

to provide minimum physical distancing guides and change protocols to limit contact.

### More information:

- [Signs, posters and templates for your workplace](#)

## Cleaning & Hand Washing

Workplaces need to frequently and regularly clean and disinfect shared spaces, including high touch communal items such as doorknobs, toilets and lunch areas.

Soap and hand sanitiser must be provided for all employees and customers throughout the worksite. Regular hand washing should be encouraged.

### More information:

- [Preventing infection in the workplace \(cleaning and disinfection\)](#)
- [Cleaning guidelines - COVID-19 deep clean](#)



## Ventilation

Good ventilation is a key measure in reducing the spread of airborne transmission in indoor workplaces.

This can be achieved through improving ventilation in indoor venues, by opening windows, doors and optimising fresh air flow in the air conditioning

system, and moving other activities outside where possible. There has been some guidance proposing a safety threshold for ventilation of indoor workplaces with outside air of at least 10 litres of outside air in offices per second per person.

Employers should monitor CO2 levels and ensure that the air conditioning systems are well maintained and circulating fresh air, rather than only using recirculating air.

### More information:

- [Ventilation](#)

## Create workforce bubbles

It may be possible to adjust rosters and develop procedures to ensure employees do not work across multiple locations, or

interact with other shifts. In the event that someone in a bubble tests positive, effective bubbles limit the number of employees who have been

in contact with the positive case and must get tested and isolate.

## Access to payments if required to miss work

The ability to access paid leave plays a critical role in preventing the spread in workplaces.

The State Government has created a number of initiatives

for workers without enough leave to ensure that financial considerations do not affect their ability to stay home when they're unwell or should be isolating.

Some employers also allow their employees to get vaccinated on paid leave. Check with your union.

### More information:

- [Financial and other support for COVID-19](#)



# Getting to work

## Public transport

If you need to use public transport make sure to wear your face mask on all public transport. Keep your distance where you can and practice good hygiene. See if you can amend

your start and finish times to travel outside peak hours. It's recommended to register your myki so that the Department of Transport can contact you if you have been exposed

to coronavirus (COVID-19) on a public transport service.

### More information:

- [COVID-19 - Department of Transport](#)

## Vehicles, Lifts & Pinch Points

There may be a risk of exposure when employees travel together in a vehicle or share the use of vehicles. Speak to your employer about eliminating unnecessary travel. Maximise physical distancing in vehicles, practise good hygiene and cleaning regimens,

drive where possible with the windows open, and wear face-masks.

Similarly, employers should ensure density requirements are observed in lifts. This may be done by signage, floor markings and staggering start

and finish times to avoid a peak hour rush.

### More information:

- [Travelling in vehicles - WorkSafe](#)
- [Managing COVID risk in the office environment - WorkSafe](#)

# Testing

If you are feeling unwell do not go to work, get tested immediately if you have any of the following symptoms: fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose and loss or change in sense of smell or taste.

## PCR Tests

The nose swab PCR test for COVID-19 is an accurate and reliable test for diagnosing COVID-19. A positive test means you likely have COVID-19. A negative test means you probably did not have COVID-19 at the time of the test. Follow Department of Health guidelines on when you should get tested,

## Rapid Antigen Test

Rapid antigen testing is a screening tool to help detect COVID-19 in people without any symptoms of COVID-19. Rapid antigen testing involves a nasal swab that is placed into a chemical solution, the result displays within 15 to 20 minutes.

It has a lower accuracy level compared to the PCR test and some industries and employers may implement it in the near future as an early detection mechanism for COVID-19. This implementation needs to be done in consultation with workers.

### More information:

- [Getting tested](#)

## Temperature checks

Temperature screening on entry to a workplace HAS BEEN implemented as an additional measure in high risk settings or in workplaces where there is a high level of community transmission.

Temperature screening may identify people who have an elevated temperature, which is one of the symptoms of COVID-19. However, temperature testing does not detect COVID and should not be used as a substitute to the other effective control measures outlined above.

### More information:

- [temperature screening - WorkSafe](#)



# Psychological considerations

Navigating uncertainty and lockdowns due to outbreaks of COVID-19 can lead to increased psychological stress and negative mental health outcomes. Research suggests that working from home leads to increased depression, anxiety and stress as the boundary between work and home gets blurred.

There are places you can reach out for support.

**More information:**

- [WorkSafe - COVID risks to mental health](#)
- [WorkSafe - COVID related stress and anxiety](#)  
[Looking after your mental health during COVID restrictions](#)

SERVICE	PHONE NUMBER
<b>Veteran Suicide Line</b>	<b>1300 651 251</b>
Telephone, video and online counselling support to people at risk of suicide, people concerned about someone else's risk of suicide and people bereaved by suicide.	
<b>Lifeline</b>	<b>13 11 14</b>
Access to crisis support and suicide prevention services for people experiencing a personal crisis.	
<b>Reconnexion</b>	<b>1300 273 266</b>
Telephone support and information for people experiencing tranquiliser dependency, anxiety disorders and depression. Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm	
<b>WIRE Women's Information</b>	<b>1300 134 130</b>
Support, information and referrals for women on any issue. Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm	
<b>Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre</b>	<b>1800 015 188</b> <b>9322 3555</b>
Information, support, referral and access to emergency accommodation/refuge for women subjected to domestic violence in Victoria.	
<b>1800 Respect</b>	<b>1800 737 732</b>
Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse	
<b>Mensline Australia</b>	<b>1300 789 978</b>
Assistance for men dealing with family and relationship issues and women/family members concerned about the welfare of their partners or family members.	



## Contingency Planning

Every workplace should have a contingency plan on what needs to be done in the event of a confirmed positive COVID-19 by an employee at the site. The employer must consult with Health and Safety Representatives and employees to develop this plan.

The plan should clearly outline the steps that need to

be taken in case of someone testing positive at the workplace, or if someone visits the site after having visited a tier 1 or tier 2 site prior.

You should feel confident that there is a clear plan on how to handle an exposure in your workplace. This lessens the likelihood of confusion and panic, and minimises the

risk of confusion leading to further exposures.

### More information:

- [Preparing for a case of COVID in your workplace](#)
- [Workplace guidance for managing suspected and confirmed cases](#)



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