Keeping safe at work during COVID-19

Updated 23 May 2022

COVID - 19

Be Safe -- Be Smart -- Be Kind

What is this factsheet about?

At Western Health, the health and safety of our staff, patients, volunteers, visitors and community is our highest priority. This factsheet outlines Western Health's principles for minimizing COVID-19 transmission, and how we can translate these into everyday practice. The guidance in this factsheet will be continuously reviewed to ensure it aligns with Department of Health guidance.

Who should read this?

Western Health employees, volunteers, students, university partners and contractors.

What are Western Health's principles for minimizing COVID-19 transmission?

Principle 1: Keep your distance from others

Keeping your distance from others includes staff, volunteers, students, visitors and patients/ consumers. Where possible:

- Keep 1.5 metres apart from others
- Avoid unnecessary contact with other people e.g. do not shake hands, hug or kiss as a greeting
- Please speak up and seek advice from the COVID-19 Response or occupational health and safety team if you feel physical distancing is not being maintained in your work area. Further information can be found at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au.

Principle 2: Maintain good hygiene

Stay safe by maintaining good hygiene. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Regularly maintain hand hygiene in accordance with the WHO 5 moments for hand hygiene
- Cough & sneeze into a tissue and place in a rubbish bin.

Principle 3: If you are unwell stay home

Please do not come to work if you are unwell

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms you should complete a COVID-19 test
- If you have symptoms and have returned a negative rapid antigen test please do not attend work and obtain confirmatory PCR as soon as possible.

- If you have returned a positive rapid antigen test you must not attend work and commence isolation. However, it is also recommended that you obtain a confirmatory PCR, particularly if you do not have any symptoms.

Wherever possible, staff are encouraged to attend the Sunshine Hospital COVID Testing Clinic so that their tests can be fast-tracked as appropriate.

Principle 4: Keep yourself and your colleagues safe and informed

Keeping safe and informed is key to prevention of COVID-19 transmission,

- Keep yourself and your colleagues informed about COVID-19. For example, regularly review the QRGs and clinical guidance on the Western Health Coronavirus Site

- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) which aligns with Western Health guidance

- Ensure you consider your level of risk and refer to the 'Vulnerable staff during COVID-19 pandemic' QRG and screening checklist to assess your risk. For those who meet the higher risk worker definition, redeployment may be required.

Principle 5: Keep the environment clean

Health Support Services provide high quality cleaning services throughout Western Health. In between scheduled cleaning, we need to assist in reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission through taking responsibility for regularly cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces in our work spaces e.g. phones, keyboards, door handles, light switches, bench tops.

How do these principles translate at Western Health?

This section details how Western Health's principles to reduce COVID-19 transmission can be translated in day to day operation.

Patients & visitors

Visitors

Visitors play an important role in the health and wellbeing of patients receiving care at Western Health. Western Health has developed guidelines about how visitation may be facilitated safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay up to date by referring to the 'Visitation QRG' on the Western Health Coronavirus Site.

COVID-19 screening of patients and visitors/support people

- COVID-19 screening processes are in place at main entry points and outpatient clinic entry points to screen incoming visitors, outpatients and support people. Stay up to date by referring to the 'Visitation Screening QRG' on the Western Health Coronavirus Site.

- In addition to entry point screening, risk assessment for face to face appointments must be carried out prior to an appointment. Refer to the 'Outpatient and Home Visit Screening Tool' on the Western Health Coronavirus Site for COVID-19 screening questions.

Transportation - Vehicle ventilation

If transporting a patient in a hospital vehicle, if safe, have them seated in the back seat. Vehicle air-conditioning should be set to fresh air to optimise ventilation.

Clinical Care

Principle 1: Keep your distance from others

- Where possible, face to face outpatient consultations and investigations should only occur by exception and where absolutely necessary. Exemptions apply on a case by case basis

- A risk assessment/ COVID-19 screening must be carried out prior to face to face appointments. See 'COVID-19 screening of patients and visitors/support people' section above for further information

- Telehealth is strongly recommended for consultations. However, please consider the patient's ability to participate in telehealth or telephone appointments and the nature of clinical care required.

- Maintain at least 1.5 metres between patients and staff, noting that this rule does not apply to members of the same household. Where physical distancing cannot be maintained to enable provision of clinical care, for example during procedures or physical examinations, minimise time in close proximity.

- Minimise any unnecessary additional people in the room (consultation rooms, patient rooms, procedure rooms, etc.)

- Provide consistent staffing for a patient or area to limit the number of staff who come into contact with a given patient.

Principle 2: Maintain good hygiene

- Ensure easy access to hand hygiene products and encourage patients/clients and their support person to practise hand hygiene before and after each visit.

Principle 3: If unwell stay home

- Ensure all patients/ clients and visitors are aware not to attend scheduled specialist clinic appointments or procedures if they are unwell or present with any COVID-19 risk factors (as per the Visitation QRG on the Western Health Coronavirus Site. **Individuals should still attend hospitals if they are seeking emergency medical treatment**

- Review appointment letters to include any COVID-19 related restrictions e.g. do not attend if you have any COVID-19 symptoms; avoid coming to your appointment early.

Principle 4: Keep yourself and your colleagues safe and informed

- Use appropriate PPE for the care or procedure being provided, ensuring that you have completed all relevant training.

- Immediately notify your manager if you have cared for a COVID-19 suspected/confirmed patient and have **not** been wearing PPE as per Western Health guidelines.

- Immediately notify your manager if you have been in contact with a COVID-19 suspected/confirmed person outside of the health service setting.

Principle 5: Keep the environment clean

- Staff should wipe down high touch surfaces and equipment between patients/clients.

All staff & students

Movement of health care workers

For guidance relating to the movement of health care workers please refer to the QRG titled 'Health Care Worker Movement during COVID-19' available on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#).

Staff who test positive to COVID-19

Staff who test positive to COVID-19 must report as soon as practicable, via the following link or QR code: https://survey.wh.org.au/redcap/surveys/?s=AFAFPP473D

Ward rounds and multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings (clinical)

- Maintain physical distancing (1.5 metres distance) from patients/clients, family members/support people and staff.
- Reduce the number of staff who enter a patient's rooms during handover and ward rounds. Consider IT solutions (e.g. virtual ward rounds; video enabled devices at the bedside) to limit physical numbers on ward rounds.
- Consider review of pathology and radiology results in other areas to reduce congregation in clinical areas.
- Hold MDT meetings as virtual meetings, if possible, as they tend to include staff from many departments and sites. Screens can be shared to share images such as medical imaging and pathology.

Gatherings of staff for education and meetings

- Training and education should be provided via virtual, non-face-to-face methods where possible.
- Face to face mandatory training and essential skills based training can be approved via local managers where participants are from the same site and involves 20 people or less.

- Other high value training and education that does not fit the above criteria requires further consideration and advice from COVID Response. Please refer to the 'Education, training and research QRG' on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#) for further information.

- Meetings, interviews, performance reviews and other activities should be held via online platforms.

- High value meetings such as staff forums or team building/planning sessions may be permitted but require approval from the relevant Divisional Director, CSD or Executive Director. Masks are recommended to be worn. If food or drink are being consumed then use of Rapid Antigen Tests is strongly recommended prior to attendance.

- When planning for a face to face gathering, the COVID-19 principles minimizing COVID-19 transmission should be abided by. A checklist (Appendix 1) is available for you to use to prepare for face to face gatherings.

Communal meals and work social events

Sharing meals is not permitted. Any catering provided should be individually wrapped and portioned. No food or drink should be consumed in shared offices or clinical environments.

Social staff gatherings or events are not permitted on Western Health sites at this time.

Industry representatives in theatre and observers

- At the current time, industry representatives and observers are not permitted unless essential to the provision of patient care.

- Record contact details for all visitors to the theatre suite on a log of attendance. This will enable contact tracing if this needs to occur. A template titled 'COVID-19 Room/ Space Log Sheet' is available on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#)

- Industry representatives and observers must complete the Visitor and Patient Attestation on entry to Western Health

- Ensure industry representatives and observers practice hand hygiene before and after each visit.

Student placements

Students make a valuable contribution to the health care sector. Continuity of student clinical placements is important to the functioning of our health system and ensuring future workforce supply. Clinical placements of health care students are permitted to continue under the current restrictions.

- Students are permitted to move between sites during their placement; however this is subject to Departmental Manager approval. It is recommended that student movement is limited wherever possible. Student coordinators are strongly encouraged to plan placement experiences that encompass as many learning opportunities within the one site.

- Students of all year levels are able to provide direct care/intervention to confirmed COVID cases, with appropriate safeguards in place.

- All students must be fit-tested for N95/P2 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) prior to commencement of their placement and receive training in correct donning/doffing of PPE (either prior to commencement of their placement or upon orientation).

- All students must comply with the relevant COVID vaccination requirements, including the requirement for a third dose.

- Any teaching or clinical placement activities that do not require patient contact should be undertaken outside of the health setting or via an alternative method such as videoconferencing or teleconferencing where possible.

For further information, please refer to the 'Student Clinical Placements and COVID-19' QRG on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#).

Environment

Work environments

Each separate work environment should be assessed to determine whether it meets the Western Health principles for reducing risk of COVID-19 transmission. Examples of different work environments include office spaces, meeting rooms, libraries, computer rooms and waiting areas. A checklist (Appendix 2) is available for you to use to assess each work environment and prepare the space to be COVID-19 safe.

Fans may increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Ensure fans are not used, and desk fans and fan heaters should be removed.

Break rooms

For relevant guidance, please refer to the QRG titled 'Use of Break Rooms and Rest Areas' on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#). The COVID-19 Response team, OH&S and the Infection Prevention team can provide additional advice where required.

Staff who have returned to work following exposure as a workplace, social or household contact must wear an N95 mask and must not utilise indoor shared break areas with their mask off until 14 days following their exposure. Details of available outdoor break areas across Western Health are listed in the 'Use of Break Rooms and Rest Areas' QRG.

An exception to this restriction is Night Shift staff. Managers of Night Shift staff who have had a COVID-19 exposure are encouraged to utilise a rostering system for available break areas to enable these staff to use an indoor break area on their own. It is recommended that when using break areas, staff remove their masks only for the period of time they are eating and drinking.

Use of mobile phones and other electronic devices in healthcare settings

Mobile phones and other electronic devices such as laptops, touch-screens, remote controls, mouse and keyboards are potential vectors for contamination and transmission of virus:

- These devices should not be taken into clinical areas unless absolutely necessary.

- Ensure mobile phones and other electronic devices are cleaned and disinfected regularly (particularly after use in COVID-19 suspected/ positive areas) following the manufacturer's instructions. If no manufacture guidance is available, consider the use of detergent/ disinfectant wipes or alcohol-base wipes containing at least 70% alcohol. Further information, including cleaning of screens is available at https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/preventing-infection-workplace-covid-19#how-to-clean-and-disinfect-after-a-coronavirus-covid-19-case-in-the-workplace

- Ensure hand hygiene is performed before and after using mobile phone and other electronic devices

- Do not use or answer mobile phones when you are wearing personal protective equipment

- Avoid sharing mobile phones, headphones or ear pods of any kind.

References

This guidance document is based on the following resources:

Department of Health. (2022). *Student clinical placements – COVID-19 guidance* (13 January 2022) Retrieved from: https://www.health.vic.gov.au/student-clinical-placements-covid-19-guidance-doc

Department of Health. (2022). *Guidance for the Pandemic (Workplace) Order 2022 (No. 6).* Retrieved from: Pandemic Order Register | health.vic.gov.au

Department of Health and Human Services (2021) COVID Response Guidance (26 February 2021)

Department of Health. (2022). *Movement of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (13 January 2022).* Retrieved from:
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiYn72P78XyAh WhIbcAHRimA6kQFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dhhs.vic.gov.au%2Fguidance-movement-workers-during-covid-19-doc&usg=AOvVaw06zry7Q5sX6rKE8_mtrNSZ

Department of Health. (2022). *Physical distancing in health services (2 November 2020).* Retrieved from: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid-19-guidance-physical-distancing-health-services

Department of Health. (2022). *COVID-19 Infection prevention and control guidelines (10 January 2022).* Retrieved from: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-guidelines

Department of Health. (2022). *COVID-19 Best practice approaches for safe staff amenities for health services (23 February 2022).* Retrieved from: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid-19-best-practice-approaches-for-safe-staff-amenities-for-health-services-doc

Department of Health. (2022). *Communicating with frontline staff in health services – Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance (21 December 2020).* Retrieved from:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/communicating-with-frontline-staff-in-health-services-covid-19-doc

Appendix 1: Face to face gathering checklist

Please complete this checklist for each face to face gathering. Resources such as posters and signage can be found here. Please ensure posters and signage are printed in colour and laminated if placed in clinical areas.

Actions	Check when completed ✓
Principle 1: Keep your distance from others	
Ensure the number of people attending your face to face gathering allows for 1.5m physical distancing to be maintained	
Position chairs 1.5 metres apart	
Abide by table signage which indicates how many staff may sit at each table	
Ensure attendees scan the room QR code to record their attendance. If no room QR code is available prepare a log sheet. Attendee names, mobile numbers & start and finish time attended should be recorded. A log sheet template titled **'COVID-19 Room/ Space Log Sheet'** is available on the Western Health Coronavirus Site. Completed log sheets should be stored by the facilitator for 6 weeks	
Principle 2: Maintain good hygiene	
Ensure alcohol-based hand rub is available for staff to complete hand hygiene (before, and after the session, and during the session as required)	
Principle 5: Keep the environment clean	
Ensure Clinell wipes are available for staff to clean shared surfaces	
Prior to and after the gathering, clean and disinfect high touch surfaces with Clinell wipes or equivalent cleaning products e.g. chair arms, door handles, light switches, bench tops, kitchen appliances	
Discourage consumption of food in the space. Ensure any catering is individually wrapped and portioned.	

Appendix 2: Environmental checklist

Please complete this checklist for each separate space[1] in your area. Resources such as posters and signage can be found here. Please ensure posters and signage are printed in colour and laminated if placed in clinical areas.

Actions	Check when completed ✓
Principle 1: Keep your distance from others	
Position chairs 1.5 metres apart - consider the need to reconfigure seating and workstation placement to adhere to physical distancing 1.5m apart & to ensure people are not facing each other. Consider the use of partitions if staff facing each other cannot be avoided	
Signage should be placed on shared tables indicating how many staff may sit at each table (1.5 metres apart)	
Reception areas only: Consider installation of Perspex screens in reception areas	
Consider a room booking process and instruct people where to wait to minimise congregation of people in corridors	
Principle 2: Maintain good hygiene	
Set up alcohol-based hand rub station/s for staff and consumers	
Consider colour printing, laminating and displaying signage for 'hygiene stations' at alcohol-based hand rub station/s	
Waiting rooms only: Set up hygiene stations in waiting rooms, equipped with signage, alcohol hand rub and tissues. Keep tissues replenished and ensure rubbish bins are available for tissue disposal	
Consider displaying appropriate signage demonstrating physical distancing and for respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/promotional-material-coronavirus-covid-19	
Principle 5: Keep the environment clean	
Set up hygiene station/s with Clinell wipes or equivalent cleaning products for staff to use	
Consider colour printing, laminating and displaying 'Thank you for…' signage where Clinell wipes/ equivalent cleaning products have been set up, to remind staff to wipe down shared workstations before and after use	
Ensure desk fans and fan heaters are removed	
Install non touch options where possible e.g. non touch water fountains	

[1] A separate space means a space separated by permanent structures.