

Best practice for managing construction sites in the COVID-19 environment

Overview

A State of Emergency was declared in Victoria from 16 March 2020 until midnight on 13 April 2020. The Chief Health Officer has powers to make Directions in the interests of public health.

The 16 March 2020 direction included a ban on non-essential mass gatherings of more than 500 people. A further direction on 18 March 2020 included a ban on non-essential mass gatherings of more than 100 people. An indoor gathering is a gathering within a single undivided enclosed area (i.e. areas, rooms or premises enclosed by a roof and walls, regardless of whether the roof or walls or any part of them are permanent, temporary, open or closed).

Victoria introduced restrictions on certain non-essential activities and venues across the state on 23 March 2020 (effective from midday on 23 March 2020), and a suite of restrictions on additional non-essential activities and venues on 25 March 2020 (effective from 12:00am on 26 March 2020). Those restrictions do not prevent construction sites and activities from operating. Further advice is available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.

This note provides guidance on best practice for reducing the spread of coronavirus within the construction industry. The construction industry is encouraged to review this guidance and implement appropriate measures on their construction sites.

This guidance is correct at the time of publication and its application may be impacted upon by future announcements relating to the operation of the construction sector.

Construction workers coming to site

Screening workers coming to site

To minimise the introduction of coronavirus to site the following measures are to be implemented:

- all workers, current and new starts, must sign a declaration that they have not been overseas, or in contact with anyone who has coronavirus.

Once such a declaration has been made the following requirement applies:

- screening all workers entering the site at the start of their shift by asking whether they have been overseas, in contact with anyone who has coronavirus, or have flu-like symptoms.

More information for businesses responding to coronavirus can be found [here](#).

Self-isolation

All travellers returning from overseas to Victoria will be placed in enforced quarantine for a self-isolation period of 14-days. This new measure is operational from 11:59pm on 28 March 2020.

If a worker has recently returned from overseas on or after 16 March 2020 or had close contact with a confirmed case, they need to:

- self-isolate at home for a period of 14 days and follow the self-isolation guidelines [here](#)
- not attend work
- contact their project director / general manager
- seek urgent medical attention if they have flu like symptoms
- not return to work until they have been cleared by a medical practitioner.

If they are experiencing flu like symptoms regardless if they have travelled overseas or had close contact with a confirmed case, they must:

- not attend work
- contact their project director / general manager for further advice and
- not return until they have been cleared by a medical practitioner

Implement clear processes to identify personnel that would have been in contact with someone if they tested positive for coronavirus. Consider and plan for business continuity should workers have to self-isolate.

Regardless of the above, workers are to minimise interaction with vulnerable people, including the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

Construction workers working on site

Physical distancing

Physical distancing of 1.5 metres between workers is to be implemented wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the length of time workers spend in close proximity is to be reduced. PPE equipment is encouraged, where available, for workers required to be in close proximity for prolonged periods of time.

If space permits, spread out in site-offices to maintain 4m² per person. Introduce restrictions on the number of staff visiting site offices at any one time.

Reduce the number of non-essential staff on-site, through working remotely. Install remote working facilities in site offices so non-site staff do not need to attend site.

Reduce instances of having to work in close proximity in site offices, such as consulting drawings outside.

If space permits, spread out in site amenities to maintain 4m² per person, or have meal breaks outside, or alternate meal breaks.

Actively consider measures to reduce the number of workers on-site at any one time through staggering start times and/or reducing the number of trades working in one area at any one-time.

Hygiene

Display health information in prominent locations on the construction site such as tea rooms, site offices, toilets, foyers, lifts and site entrances.

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Implement good cough etiquette by covering your cough and sneeze, or cough into your elbow or shoulder.

Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth if you can help it.

Provide hand sanitiser at site entrances and exits, in all hoists, amenities and other areas of site. Communicate to all staff where hand sanitisers are located and encourage their regular use.

Maintaining shared spaces and touchpoints

Minimise the use of shared tools. Where used, tools are to be cleaned regularly.

Implement twice daily cleaning to 'Frequently Touched Surfaces' (door handles, stair handrails, light switches, lift buttons, table tops in between individual uses, fridges and microwave handles, tapware etc). Advice on cleaning and disinfecting non-healthcare settings to reduce transmission can be found [here](#).

To reduce interaction between trades, allocate specific areas in the site amenities to each trade and request they eat at the same location daily.

Avoid meetings with others, adopt alternative measures such as merged phone calls, skype or video conferencing where established.

Maintain a clean site and provide rubbish bins for tissues and any used PPE. Empty bins regularly and remove off-site.

Communication

Establish an employer and union communication structure.

Modify site inductions to identify potential risks, such as recent travel and health issues, and to educate new starters on the controls in place on the worksite.

Provide clarity to staff on leave arrangements for those that cannot work to encourage self-reporting and minimise the spread of risk.

Reinforce the Chief Health Officer's messaging on the severity of the pandemic and the importance of self-isolation at toolbox meetings.

Encourage workers to put forward practical ideas at toolbox meetings for changing work practices to avoid the spread of coronavirus.

If the Victorian Government determines to suspend or shut down government funded construction projects on account of public health concerns relating to coronavirus, it will make reasonable attempts to give advance notice of those decisions to relevant employers and employment unions. No government site will be partially or fully closed on account of public health concerns relating to coronavirus without direction by or advice from the Victorian Chief Health Officer.

More information

Coronavirus updates - dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Coronavirus hotline - 1800 675 398

Worksafe - worksafe.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases

Victorian Building Industry Disputes Panel - vbidb.org.au