

## COVID-19 Pandemic

# AN EMPLOYER GUIDE

With the Covid 19 outbreak intensifying around the world, it's an extremely unsettling time for many families as government and business rapidly respond to the evolving situation on a daily basis.

As a priority, employers have a duty of care to look after the health and wellbeing of their people and customers and comply with official COVID 19 directives issued by the Australian Federal and State Governments to keep Australians safe at work, in the community and at home.

Parents At Work have put together a COVID 19 Emergency Response Guide for Employers – it's a short guide on what organisations need to consider and actions you can take to maintain a secure and productive workplace for both employees and for business – particularly for vulnerable employees and those caring for family, who will be the most challenged.

### **How families are being impacted:**

- Parents now need to more closely monitor their children's health more than usual – and are keeping them home from school immediately if they appear unwell.
- Many parents may now need to be working from home with children in their care, making the usual juggle even more challenging.
- Carers are worried about the elderly, ill and vulnerable who are unable to adequately care for themselves - with self-isolation and other health requirements being stepped up.
- Most managers are unfamiliar with managing remote teams and need support with their communications and managing their team's priorities.
- Employees with suspected COVID-19, or who are being tested for COVID-19, may experience guilt or anxiety if there is an impact on their team.
- Children need positive reassurance – employees may need help with planning work and a structure to their days so that kids adjust to a new work and care routine.

### **Whilst not an exhaustive list, the following are constructive policies and plans that will help and can be implemented immediately.**

- Form a workforce planning team to put together an action plan for crisis response. Consider things like: what will happen if an employee tests positive? How will the business inform co-workers and clients? How will the work-space be sanitised? How will employees still perform work if isolated at home? Develop response plan communication and create FAQs.
- Identify 'high risk' or vulnerable employees - those with pre-existing health issues, caring responsibilities, dependants, sole carer families, etc. - and create alternative work plans for them to reduce the risk.
- Distribute credibly sourced health information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections in your workplace and how to identify symptoms. Ask employees to self-report if they feel their health is potentially at risk, or if they begin to see any symptoms.

Please contact Parents At Work should you need to discuss how you can best support your employees at this time.

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- Request employees conduct as many client meetings remotely when possible to limit travel between locations, or postpone non-urgent meetings to limit face-to-face contact.
- Create a travel register. Consider putting a stop to all non-essential work travel. Ask employees to self-report and inform your workplace where they have travelled personally or professionally in the last 14 days, or where they intend to travel personally in the next four weeks. Ensure employees self-isolate for 14 days when they return from overseas.\*
- Allow employees to work from home if they can do their job away from the workplace. Have all staff on alert to be 'work from home ready'. Set up work-from-home directives and ensure employees have the necessary connectivity they need. Ask people to come forward now with what they need (e.g. laptop or remote login to systems).
- Help families create a work from home routine. Create a work from home checklist. Consider the WHS guidelines so employees can be instructed to set up a safe work from home arrangement.
- Communicate and train leaders on how to lead virtual teams and rapidly manage flexible work arrangements.
- Help employees review and redesign their roles quickly, and identify the elements of their role they'll be able to continue independently and remotely so gaps can be addressed.
- Share the Care: consider what back-up child care and adult care services your organisation could make available to working parents and carers in the form of rebates or similar. If schools shut down, parents will immediately be unable to attend work – and may struggle to work from home with children, so flexible work hours will be needed for parents sharing the caring load. Sole carers will require even greater flexibility.
- Offer work life well-being support. Employees and their families may experience stress and anxiety about the work and caring changes they are experiencing and may need access to counselling or coaching services.
- Ensure your employees are aware of what form of leave they have available to them. How they will be paid if they are sick or if they are self-isolating or working from home? Consider extending additional paid and unpaid sick leave to support people.
- Consider how critical roles may be impacted. Identify critical talent and implement a plan as to how these roles and this workload will be covered should these employees become ill.
- Communicate daily updates from the CEO or HR on coronavirus response planning. It is important that your employees feel updated and informed as to how the business is responding.
- Above all, approach and communicate all responses in a reassuring, clear and reasonable way to support your people through this time of uncertainty.

**For further information on how your workplace can prepare and support employees, go to:**

- [A Guide to Self-Isolation or Quarantine - GPs Can](#)
- [Tips for Coping with Coronavirus Anxiety \(PDF\)](#)
- [Coronavirus: Guidance for HR Professionals and Employers - AHRU](#)

\*Watch for updates and follow updated advice from state and federal government agencies.

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