

# FAQs – preventing the spread of COVID-19 in residential construction.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, employers in the residential construction industry must take action to protect workers and others at the workplace from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 so far as is reasonably practicable.

All employers should refer to the '[Work health and safety during COVID-19: Guide to keeping your workplace safe, clean and healthy](#)' publication (OIR COVID-19 Guide) as a first step in managing the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The residential construction industry has unique circumstances which may see on-site worker numbers vary widely depending on the stage of construction. In addition, there may not be a regular single point of contact on site at any one time. This poses specific difficulties in ensuring that amenities, including porta-loos, are adequately cleaned to maintain a hygienic environment that will help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This and other issues are addressed in the FAQs below.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***How can employers on residential construction sites manage the cleaning of amenities, specifically relating to portable toilets, during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

In addition to the requirement to manage amenities in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011* (Qld) and the *Managing the Work Environment and facilities Code of Practice 2011*, all construction workplaces should implement an enhanced system for routine inspecting and cleaning of amenities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers should implement a [COVID safe plan](#) which outlines how amenities are to be managed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Employers may choose to develop their plan using the WHSQ COVID safe plan template or choose a different plan structure provided key elements are addressed. The plan could be based on content from the OIR COVID-19 Guide, Queensland Health (QH) COVID Voluntary Safe Checklist and COVID Safe Industry Plans. Queensland MBA members may also choose to proactively develop their own COVID Safe guidance for industry. Examples of plans developed by other industry bodies can be found at <https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/approved-industry-covid-safe-plans>.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the builder or principal contractor (PC) to ensure that a plan is in place, is effective, and is adhered to.

The day to day application of the plan should be managed by the site supervisor, and all workers, contractors and visitors to the site should be inducted into the plan.

In the context of COVID-19, residential construction workplaces should routinely (at least daily) clean frequently touched surfaces (this may include toilets, door handles, taps). Infrequently touched surfaces should be cleaned at least weekly, or more regularly as determined by a risk assessment.

In practical terms, a cleaning register (e.g. attached to a portable toilet) may be a useful way to track cleaning actions. Additional site requirements may include that persons wipe down the toilet seat and other surfaces after each use with detergent/disinfectant wipes supplied by the employer with a thorough clean being undertaken at least once per day when workers are on site.

Note: The supply of cleaning wipes alone is not a system for inspecting and cleaning the amenity. Employers must provide sufficient cleaning and disinfection supplies and equipment and a cleaning protocol or engage a suitable cleaning service. Employers must also ensure the cleaning protocol is being adhered to and that the cleaning protocol details the system for cleaning, such as responsibilities for cleaning, frequency of cleaning and methods of cleaning.

### ***Do toilets have to be cleaned by a professional daily?***

Page 6 of the OIR COVID-19 Guide notes that routine cleaning should be undertaken at least daily. In a residential housing construction workplace this would mean daily when there are workers on site.

Further, the OIR COVID-19 Guide states that there is no requirement for this to be undertaken by a professional, but employers must provide sufficient cleaning and disinfection supplies. Employers must also ensure there is a cleaning protocol in place, that the cleaning protocol is being adhered to and that the cleaning protocol details the system for cleaning, such as responsibilities for cleaning, frequency of cleaning and methods of cleaning.

### ***Do all people on a construction site need to complete a “COVID-19 declaration” daily? For example, answer questions like one would answer at a restaurant (e.g. “Have you got flu like symptoms? Have you been interstate or to a COVID-19 hotspot?” etc). Is there a need for a sign that has a self-declaration on entry or a form that people fill out and what does ‘compliance’ look like regarding the above questions and construction site declarations?***

Page 9 of the OIR COVID-19 Guide advises employers to ‘instruct workers to not attend work if they develop a flu-like illness or have been directed by health authorities to self-quarantine or self-isolate’. Active monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms may be recommended for some industries, for example where workers live together in shared accommodation such as fly-in fly-out or agricultural workers or in workplaces where vulnerable people are present, such as at hospitals and residential aged care facilities’.

While there is no blanket requirement for construction workers to complete a COVID declaration, employers do need to be aware of who is frequenting the work site. For example, in residential construction multiple tradespeople will access a site, and the builder or PC should have in place a system to capture this information – this may take the form of recording the details of tradespeople on a weekly or fortnightly work schedule.

It should also be noted that if workers are living onsite in shared accommodation or working on a site where vulnerable people are present (e.g. retirement village/healthcare setting), active monitoring (including use of checklists of symptoms/declarations) may be appropriate or may be required under a direction by the Chief Health Officer. For example, the [public health direction for aged care](#) requires that people with a fever or history of a fever, symptoms of acute respiratory infection, loss of smell, loss of taste, runny nose, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting or fatigue, must not enter, or remain on, the premises of a residential aged care facility.

Ultimately, the builder or PC must assess the COVID-19 risks for the construction site and decide what control measures need to be implemented to prevent or minimise exposure to those risks. This may take the form of a self-declaratory sign, a signed form, or by asking people questions on entry, depending on the risk assessment.

***During a rain event can people gather in covered areas that are not strictly crib rooms while the rain passes?***

Where such a gathering occurs, there should be a focus on ensuring social distancing is achieved.

Page 4 of the OIR COVID-19 Guide outlines ways to achieve social distancing, including keeping a distance between people of at least 1.5 metres, and limiting the number of people in an enclosed area where possible.

***Inspectors are obviously including COVID-19 as part of their everyday inspections. In this context, what does compliance look like, and what will WHSQ inspectors be looking for?***

Queensland MBA members should be referred to the OIR COVID-19 Guide, which already includes construction industry-oriented examples.

***What will WHSQ look for when asking for a COVID safe plan?***

Queensland MBA should refer members to the OIR COVID-19 Guide.

***What does WHSQ look for when asking about a process for contact tracing?***

Page 11 of the OIR COVID-19 Guide states that: 'If someone at your workplace is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, they will be directed by a Public Health Unit to self-isolate and they must not attend work until their health provider advises that they can. The Public Health Unit will contact the employer when contract tracing of the workplace is required to identify close contacts. The Public Health Unit will direct close contacts to self-quarantine, and they must not attend work during this period.'

Employers should ensure they keep the names/contact details of workers as well as site visitors. It is suggested that employers keep a record of the names of workers and site visitors, dates and times they attended, contact details specific to that person (phone number, email, address – not generic company details such as info@company.com or PO Boxes or 1300 numbers etc.) and for larger sites, the locations on-site visited by the person. A physical site plan may also assist health authorities with contact tracing.

Further information about [Collecting contact information for COVID-19](#) is available on the Queensland Health website. Please note that this information relates to restricted businesses such as restaurants and entertainment venues and has been provided as a guide only.

***Can a worker do a task if it means the worker cannot keep a 1.5m social distance from another person?***

Page 4 of the OIR COVID-19 Guide outlines social distancing requirements of at least 1.5 metres between people to the extent possible, and for the number of people in an enclosed area to be limited where possible. Employers must also follow any public health directions as these apply to the business.

***Are construction sites bound by the requirements as outlined in the [Restrictions on Businesses, Activities and Undertakings Direction \(No. 9\)](#)? What are the expectations for construction sites to reduce the spread of COVID-19?***

Construction sites are not restricted businesses under the [Restrictions on Businesses, Activities and Undertakings Direction \(No. 9\)](#) (the Direction) and therefore are not bound by the requirements of the Direction. However, certain activities that could occur on a construction site may be classed

as a restricted business, such as an onsite café. Requirements in the Direction would apply only to those activities, not the whole construction site, e.g. occupant density restrictions would apply to the on-site café. Construction sites are still required to ensure that they have a plan and strategies in place to manage risk from COVID-19.

Include strategies such as:

- maintaining social distancing so far as is reasonably practicable given the circumstances and demands at the workplace – this may be achieved by keeping workers at least 1.5m apart, reducing the number of workers in a given area, organising schedules to reduce workers in certain areas onsite, assigning work units that work and take rest breaks together, using physical barriers, etc.
- ensuring social distancing is supported by enhanced personal hygiene:
  - washing hands with soap and water or applying hand sanitiser where hand washing amenities are not readily available
  - cough and sneeze etiquette
- ensuring enhanced environmental hygiene:
  - regular cleaning and disinfection
  - staying at home when sick
  - worker training
  - managing vulnerable workers, and
  - provision of sufficient supplies to support control measures:
    - hand sanitiser in vehicles
    - cleaning and disinfecting equipment etc.