

18 March 2020

NAME
TITLE
COMPANY
BY EMAIL TO:

Dear NAME,

Re: COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

I write to you as an employer representative of a company that employee's members of the CEPU SA Branch.

As you are aware, Australian workplaces facing serious and unprecedented challenges due to the spread of COVID-19 Pandemic.

This correspondence is intended to assist you and your company in meeting your obligations to protect the health and safety of employees and to support employees to control the spread of this virus.

EMPLOYERS HAVE A DUTY TO ENSURE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF EMPLOYEES AND OTHERS

The WHS Act requires employers to ensure the health and safety of employees and other persons so far as is reasonably practicable. This is achieved through employers managing risks to health and safety.

The WHS Act requires employers to identify and **control** risks to health and safety by following these four steps:

1. **Identify hazards** – Find out what could cause harm
2. **Assess risks** – understand the nature of the harm of the hazard, how serious it is and how likely it is to occur
3. **Control risks** – implement the **most** effective control so far as is reasonably practicable.
4. **Review controls** – review these controls to ensure that they are working effectively.

COVID-19 is a hazard to the health and safety of employees and others. It is a highly contagious virus that will result in illness in many people and cause serious illness and even death in a smaller group of 'high risk' people.

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John Adley - Secretary

There is no vaccine currently available for COVID-19. The most effective **control** is to identify potential carriers of the virus and support them to self-isolate to avoid exposing others.

This requires **full cooperation** of employers and employees and it is essential that employees feel **supported to declare potential illness**. Workplaces that do not provide support to employees to declare potential illness are increasing the risk to employees and others.

WHAT IS COVID -19 - Coronavirus?

Coronavirus is a group of viruses which normally cause mild illness, with symptoms similar to a common cold. A new strain, COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Hubei Province, China.

It is very different from, and more serious than, the usual seasonal influenza outbreaks that happen every year.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include a fever, fatigue, dry cough, difficulty breathing and will be accompanied by a fever. Symptoms take an average of 5 days to begin – this differs to flu viruses which tend to incubate very quickly. The virus is transmitted by breathing in droplets that go into the air during coughing and sneezing. The virus needs to be in living beings to survive however, it will survive on surfaces and appropriate cleaning and disinfectant should be applied.

Over 80% of people infected with COVID 19 will experience mild symptoms similar to the common cold and may not be aware that they have the virus – this is one of the reasons it spreads easily. A smaller group [15%] will experience more severe symptoms with a minority [5%] suffering from pneumonia.

At risk people?

The illness is more severe in older people [over 65 years] or people who chronic diseases such as heart and lung conditions. About 5% of infected people will have a “flu” like illness. It appears that children get very mild symptoms.

As this is a new virus the health information is continually being updated.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

The main way the virus spreads is by contamination when someone carrying the virus coughs or sneezes. The air droplets are breathed in by another person or can be transferred to another person

WORKPLACE ACTION

COVID – 19 is a **health and safety risk**. Employers have obligations to ensure the health and safety of workers and others. They **must have a plan** on what will be done to protect and

support workers and health and safety representatives (HSRs) **must be consulted on this plan.**

We know that the best way to protect workers and the public is to make sure that employers:

1. Identify those who are potentially infected early and **support** them to isolate whilst waiting for test results
2. Minimise the potential of spread, isolate and **support** those who are at higher risk for COVID -19. For example, close contact of someone with COVID-19 or have returned from travel in certain locations
3. Quarantine and **support** those who are infected early until they are healthy and no longer contagious (for at least 14 days).

WHY IS SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

It is essential that workers are supported to take the measures necessary to help control the spread of the virus. Workers who are not supported to isolate are at great risk of not identifying themselves. All workers need access to paid special leave and be supported to identify potential exposure and isolate at home. Casual workers, and others without access to leave, are more likely to attend work whilst sick for fear of a loss of income or future shifts.

Unions are calling for 2 weeks paid special leave to be granted to any worker impacted by COVID-19 that is required to isolate or is unable to work.

Work, Health and Safety Laws are clear [WHS Act s47-49, Victoria OHS Act s35-36, WA OHS Act s35] employers must consult with HSRs and workers.

A workplace plan for dealing with COVID-19 must include the following:

- the information, training and support and local measures for infection control including:
 - appropriate hygiene,
 - social distancing and isolation, and
 - work from home arrangement where practicable
- how to report any concerns in a way that **encourages workers reporting** and ensures they are **not discriminated against or suffer any adverse consequences**. Supporting workers to take the necessary precautions is essential. Misinformation or the **poor or adverse treatment of workers identifying exposure will increase the risk of spread**
- arrangements for those required to be away from work, as a result of infection control measures.
 - paid special leave for confirmed cases,

- paid special leave for self-isolation as a result of contact with confirmed cases, or whilst awaiting test results
- paid special leave for self-isolation if returning from travel to certain locations
- what to do if there a suspected case or person with COVID 19 has been at the workplace. In some circumstances this will require relocating workers from impacted area until a deep clean is undertaken
- the contingency plans for leave, reallocation and re-organisation of work, if health authorities shut down schools, public events, work sites to ensure workers can meet requirements to care for children or other dependent family members.

There are sectors where the Plan will need to have more precise arrangements, for example

- Health and community sector and cleaners - All of these workplaces must practice universal infection control measures. All workers should have been trained and have access to the appropriate protective equipment and appropriate free testing.
- Public facing workers - Workers dealing with public, who are at increased risk of exposure and will be likely to be very anxious, must be provided with a working environment free from harassment and bullying and must be supported at their workplace to minimise the effects of heightened anxiety and aggression from clients and customers. Employers are required to ensure health, including psychological health, and further steps may be required to ensure that **psychosocial hazards** are identified and controlled appropriately.

Consultation under the law is not just talking – it is having workers and HSRs views considered before a decision is made.

Information – to all workers and everyone who is in the workplace,

1. Provide information and training - clear, concise health information needs to be easily available, in many forms and languages e.g. posters, leaflets, emails, small video clips.
2. Work must make it easy for everyone to practice good hygiene –
 1. easy access to water and soap
 2. easy access to hand sanitisers (60% alcohol)
 3. easy access to rubbish disposal for tissues, disposable hand towels [hand dryers are not recommended]
 4. household disinfectant for hard surfaces especially where members public are involved.
3. What to do if a “suspected or confirmed case” has been in the workplace. Contact with a confirmed or suspected case may require people to go into self-isolation and to seek medical assistance. However, casual contact, where there has been less than 15 minutes face to face contact or less than 2 hours in a shared closed space with the symptomatic person, will only require them to monitor their health.

Information on what to do if people are feeling unwell

Employers have a duty to monitor conditions at work, this includes making sure people know how to report and what to do if they are feeling unwell.

First Aiders and First Aid Kits

First Aiders are likely to be asked for General health information and should ensure they are practicing infection control measures when giving first aid.

Contingency plans

Preparedness and making information available to everyone improves infection control, decreases stress and anxiety and helps everyone make plans. This will be exceptionally important if health authorities shut down schools, public events, work sites etc.

Influenza vaccines

The risk of COVID –19 will start to coincide with the flu season. There is no vaccine for COVID -19 but there is one for Influenza. Employers need to be making arrangements to provide the flu vaccine **free of charge** – it is likely to become available during April 2020.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Adley', enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

John Adley
Branch Secretary
CEPU Electrical Energy and Services Division - SA Branch

List of employers who have agreed to two weeks special leave.

Employers should always make the health and wellbeing of employees a priority for their business. When facing something as unprecedented as [COVID-19](#), this has never been more critical.

The following businesses have been nominated by workers across Australia as granting access to special paid sick leave and additional support*, which is fundamental to ensuring the safety of all Australians through this event.

- Officeworks
- Telstra
- Woolworths
- Target
- Kmart
- Victorian State Government employees
- Westpac
- CBA
- ANZ
- Macquarie University
- Sydney University
- Southern Cross University.
- ED Oates Warehouse
- Star Casino
- Association of Massage Therapists
- ACT Government
- Atlassian
- Canva
- NextDC
- WA Government
- Latrobe University
- World Vision Australia
- Our Community
- Slater & Gordon Lawyers
- Adelaide Community Healthcare Alliance
- SBS
- Encapto WiFi
- Loving Earth
- Student Representative Council, University of Sydney (SRC)
- City Chic
- Rokt
- Google
- BUPA
- Maurice Blackburn Lawyers
- NSW Government

**Please note that these employers have been submitted via form through social media. ACTU takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the submitted information.*

Tell us about your workplace by [filling out our form](#).