

# VBA guideline for contractors and trades managing their risk of exposure to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This guide provides information for contractors and trades required to work on sites that may be occupied by people who either have a confirmed case of Coronavirus (COVID-19) or are self-isolating due to suspected exposure. This guidance is based on the *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines for the Building and Construction Industry (revision 3)*.

## Hazard and risk management

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) has an obligation to ensure contractors and trades can manage risks to their health and safety while working on occupied sites. While the VBA will make every effort to identify and communicate all known hazards and controls, contractors and trades have an obligation to manage their risk of injury and illness while on site. They can do this by:

1. Conducting their activities at a time when the risk of exposure to COVID-19 has been mitigated, effectively eliminating the risk.
2. Substituting a dwelling or work location with one that has minimal risk of exposure.
3. Isolating people from a work area by having them move into another area of a dwelling while work is carried out.
4. Maintaining a minimum distance of 1.5 metres from all people on site whenever possible.
5. Using personal protective equipment if the risk of exposure is too great.

## Limiting site access and screening of workers and visitors

Each building or site may have its own procedures in place for managing occupant safety. These procedures may include a requirement for visitors to confirm whether they have been overseas recently, in contact with anyone who has COVID-19 or have flu-like symptoms. In some circumstances, particularly those involving highly vulnerable occupants, entry may be refused, in which case alternative arrangements should be considered with the relevant parties when work or activities are essential.

Building managers and owners may ask contractors and trades about any recent exposure to COVID-19

they might have had. However, building managers and owners cannot ask about a person's medical history (e.g. whether they have a history of respiratory illness or heart conditions that would place them in a high-risk category). Contractors or trades may provide this information if they believe it is relevant, but they are not required to provide any private medical information.

## Good hygiene practices

Practising good hygiene is the number one defence against contracting COVID-19. All contractors and trades required to enter a site where there is a risk of exposure must:

1. Wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or apply hand sanitiser that is at least 60 per cent alcohol content prior to entering a site.
2. Refrain from touching their nose, mouth or eyes, or any part of their face until they have left the site and washed their hands. Although COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and not transmitted through the skin, infection can occur if a person touches their nose, mouth or eyes.
3. Not touch or come into contact with any other person (i.e. no handshakes or physical contact).
4. Ensure their nose and mouth are covered by their upper arm, a flexed elbow or a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing. Tissues should only be used once, then disposed of in a bin. Hands should be washed thoroughly after coughing, sneezing or handling used tissues.
5. Use alcohol wipes to clean all equipment taken on site both between uses and after its removal from a site.
6. Wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or hand sanitiser when leaving a site and after removing PPE.

## Physical distancing on site

Contractors and trades should always follow physical distancing requirements while on site. This means contractors and trades must:

1. Maintain at least 1.5 metres between all other people on site whenever possible.
2. Apply the 'one person per four square metre' rule when working in common areas and living spaces. Ask residents to vacate to other rooms or avoid common areas when work is to be carried out. Where it is not possible to move residents or restrict their movements, limit the amount of time they are in close proximity (to less than 15 minutes face to face or less than two hours in a confined space).
3. Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves and N95/P2 masks if working in close proximity for prolonged periods (i.e. more than 15 minutes face to face or two hours in a confined space).
4. Limit meetings and discussions to two people only. Meetings with three or more people should be held via phone or video conference.
5. Consider using safety barriers and 'danger' tape to keep people out of work areas when a job is expected to take more than 20 to 30 minutes.

## Shared tools, plant and equipment

Contractors and trades should avoid sharing tools, plant and equipment whenever possible. This means drills, reciprocating saws, ladders or elevated work platforms should not be used by more than one person. Where it is not possible to eliminate shared use, contractors and trades must:

1. Clean all common touch points on shared tools, plant and equipment before and after use.
2. Wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser before and after every use.
3. Dispose of used alcohol wipes immediately after use.

Contractors and trades should not share mobile phones, tablets, cameras, laptops or other devices. Where this cannot be avoided, devices should be cleaned before and after use by each person.

## Travel to and from sites

Contractors and trades must ensure their travel to and from sites is conducted safely and in accordance with government advice on cleaning and hygiene. To ensure the appropriate safety measures are taken, all

vehicles should have adequate sanitisation and disinfection facilities.

Physical distancing measures also apply to contractors and trades travelling to and from sites:

- Single-cab vehicles, such as utes, should only have one driver and one passenger per vehicle, suitably distanced.
- Dual-cab or sedan vehicles should only have two people (one driver and one passenger) in the front and one passenger in the back, all suitably distanced.

All common touch points in shared work vehicles (i.e. pool vehicles) should be cleaned regularly to ensure adequate hygiene and protection.

## Personal Protective Equipment

The following Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be used when physical distancing measures cannot be maintained. Contractors and trades should:

1. Ensure they receive information, training and reinforcement on how to correctly fit, store and maintain various types of PPE.
2. Use a correctly fitted mask with an airtight seal, such as an N95/P2 mask. N95/P2 masks must fit to the face with an airtight seal, as they will not function correctly if the wearer has facial hair (i.e. a beard or moustache). Wearing an N95/P2 mask is the minimum recommended requirement for reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Contractors and trades can wear either a correctly fitted N95/P2 disposable mask or a correctly fitted reusable mask with an N95/P2 filter.
  - **N95/P2 disposable masks:** These masks can be used for a whole day but should not be used for any longer. Always dispose of used masks in a rubbish bin.
  - **Reusable masks with an N95/P2 filter:** Filters in these masks are disposable and do not require replacement until the mask becomes difficult to breathe through. The filter is located within the mask, away from any area that can be touched accidentally. The outside surfaces of the mask should be cleaned with an alcohol wipe after use, and the mask should be stored in its storage bag or a resealable plastic bag.
3. Only use surgical masks when trying to stop germs spreading from themselves to others. A

- surgical mask is unlikely to stop the wearer from being exposed to COVID-19.
4. Wear latex-free, disposable gloves when required to touch surfaces in common areas or surfaces that are not cleaned regularly. Disposable gloves should be disposed of between each shift and site visit. Never reuse the same gloves.
  5. Wear safety glasses to protect their eyes. Safety glasses should be cleaned with alcohol wipes after use and placed in their protective case.
  6. Clean tools and equipment with alcohol wipes after leaving a site. Used alcohol wipes can be used to wipe down shoes after leaving a site, then disposed of in a rubbish bin.
4. If a contractor or trade is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been diagnosed and is not at work, they should call the Coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline on 1800 675 398 and/or seek immediate medical attention. They should also notify their employer and VBA contact as soon as possible.
  5. If a case of COVID-19 is diagnosed, the Department of Health and Human Services will notify the relevant employer and provide appropriate advice if the contractor or trade is believed to have been infectious while on site, and there are necessary actions for a site to take (e.g. cleaning or assisting with contact tracing activities).

### What if a contractor or trade has been exposed to COVID-19, been in contact with someone infected with COVID-19 or is exhibiting flu-like symptoms?

1. If a contractor or trade has been in close contact (i.e. more than 15 minutes face to face or two hours in a confined space) with a confirmed case of COVID-19, they are required to stop work immediately and notify both their employer and their VBA contact. The contractor or trade must then self-quarantine at home for 14 days.
2. If a contractor or trade has only been in casual contact (i.e. less than 15 minutes face to face or less than two hours in a confined space) with a confirmed case of COVID-19, they must monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days from the time when the contact took place. Anyone in this situation must notify their employer and VBA contact. They must also keep a record of people they come into contact with, but are not required to self-quarantine at home.
3. If a contractor or trade is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been diagnosed and is at work, they should notify their employer and VBA contact, then leave work immediately, before calling the Coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline on 1800 675 398 and/or seeking immediate medical attention. The contractor or trade should then ensure, with their employer's assistance, that they take precautions to avoid exposing other people to infection while travelling home or to medical attention.

### Further information

For further information, please refer to the *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines for the Building and Construction Industry*, available from [vba.vic.gov.au/coronavirus](http://vba.vic.gov.au/coronavirus).