

Environmental Health Professionals around Australia

COVID-19 Pandemic Report

Presented by

Environmental Health Australia

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Overview

Melbourne, Sydney and to a lesser extent Brisbane, were the first localised areas in Australia to have positive recordings of COVID-19, with the first case being reported on the 25th January in Victoria. The novel Corona virus COVID-19 has put tremendous pressure on the Australian health care system and public health units, Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) included. While EHO's existing responsibilities such as food safety, water quality and other public health concerns remain in place, State and Local Governments are utilising EHO's for other pandemic specific duties. Recorded below is a list of duties currently being performed by EHO's to support COVID-19 action plans within their respective states.

State Activities

Queensland

Queensland Health EHO's in the Department of Health and the Public Health Units are:

- Playing an integral role in the planning and response to COVID-19.
- Contributing to coordination and functional roles within Incident Management Teams within emergency operation centers.
- Performing airport and seaport border screening and assessment.
- Undertaking case management including contact tracing.
- Working in contacts management including the issuing of quarantine and isolation notices.
- Undertaking compliance monitoring and surveillance operations with regulatory partners.
- Providing expert and technical advice to stakeholders including Local and District Disaster Management Committees.
- Providing appropriate health advice and ongoing support to mandatory quarantine/isolation accommodation providers.

Queensland Local government EHO's are:

- Providing assistance to Queensland Health where needed.
- BAU as much as possible in local government (includes food safety (not nursing homes unless urgent issue), pollution, community safety and amenity etc.).
- Supporting and providing advice to their superiors, colleagues and the community where possible.

Defence Force EHO's in Queensland are:

- Providing assistance to Queensland Health where needed.
- Supporting and providing advice to their superiors and colleagues.

New South Wales

New South Wales EHO's are:

- Working with Risk/Governance teams in advisory roles.
- Supporting Local Emergency Management Officers in an EH advisory role if required.
- Supporting the Workplace Health & Safety team with information from NSW Health and the World Health Organisation.
- Supporting the Water and Sewer team with any information on COVID-19 that has bearing on their operations.
- Reviewing EH drinking water management program, monitoring, and CCP's against chlorine residual advice.
- Reviewing Council owned swimming pools, food premises, and cooling towers.
- Providing hand hygiene and environmental cleaning education and communications.

Victoria

Victorian EHO's are:

- Continuing to provide uninterrupted environmental /public health and immunisation functions to ensure critical public health functions are met.
- Developing and implementing a COVID-19 Response and action plan.
- Constantly adjusting Planning, development and implementation of modified service delivery models based on latest advice from DHHS CHO.
- Continually monitoring workloads across Environmental Health and Immunisation.
- Prioritising food businesses regarding risks and adjusting inspection regimes as appropriate.
- Preparing and distributing both internal and external communications for Councils.
- Educating and advising food and other businesses on compliance with COVID-19 restrictions.
- Providing assistance to State DHHS where needed.
- Participating in regional DHHS teleconferences and video conferences.

- Completion of Risk Assessment Plan for Immunisation that articulates mitigation strategies in place to manage risks to staff and public safety.
- Providing Additional resourcing and support to Immunisation teams to implement risk mitigation strategies.
- Preparing and updating Business Continuity Plans tailored for COVID-19 scenario.
- Surveying and check-in with staff on personal impacts of COVID-19 measures on work/life balance to help plan for any workforce impacts.
- Maintaining regular check-ins to all staff working remotely through Team Leader.
- Implementing staff wellness activities, incl: virtual yoga, meditation, virtual team catch-ups via Krew app and informally via MS teams or Zoom.
- Participating in regular forums/meetings and provide advice to Council senior management to manage business continuity and emergency responses.

Tasmania

State government level (Dept of Health - Environmental Health Unit) EHO's are:

- Contact tracing/quarantine management.
- Assisting with the Public Health hotline
- Developing/providing input into SOP's and plans as needed and contributing to the ongoing strategic planning.
- Providing guidance to stakeholders and local government EHO's on interpretation and application of Directions.
- Advising Public Health Emergency Operations Centre.

Local government EHO's are:

- Prioritising food businesses regarding risks and adjusting inspection regimes as appropriate, conducting inspections by phone with minimal or no site inspections.
- Educating and advising food and other businesses on compliance with COVID-19 restrictions.
- Advising COVID-19 restrictions on Council own facilities and services.
- Responding to community inquiries regarding COVID-19 restrictions.
- Assisting with staff influenza vaccinations.
- Providing support/advice in accordance with local Emergency Management plans.

South Australia

South Australian EHO's are involved with:

- Operational briefings and information sharing.
- Compliance of social distancing.
- Compliance of business closures.
- Education and advice to businesses on compliance.
- Welfare checks on those self isolating that have registered with the Red Cross for this service.
- An EHO Planning Team has also been established under the Local Government Functional Support Group to develop resources and tools required for council EHO's.

EHA South Australia has also partnered with SA Health and state authorities to monitor and enforce COVID-19 regulations.

Western Australia

At the State government level (Environmental Health Directorate – Dept of Health) EHO's are:

- Participating with and coordinating EH advice regarding COVID-19 restrictions with partner agencies – WA Police, CDC, WALGA, State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC), etc.
- Providing guidance to local government EHO's on interpretation and application of Directions.

Western Australia Local government EHO's are:

- Prioritising food businesses regarding risks and adjusting inspection regimes as appropriate.
- Educating and advising food and other businesses on compliance with COVID-19 restrictions.
- Advising and enforcing COVID-19 restrictions on Council own facilities and services
- Providing support/assistance/advice in accordance with local Emergency Management plans.
- Responding to community inquiries regarding COVID-19 restrictions.

EHA National Activities

Environmental Health Australia (EHA) is the premier environmental health professional organisation in Australia, advocating environmental health issues and representing the professional interests of all environmental health practitioners. EHA is committed to the professional development and status of its members and the enhancement of environmental health standards and services to the community through advocacy, promotion, education and leadership.

A circular was sent to all EHA members late in March to inform them of available resources, the current situations and current actions being taken by EHA regarding upcoming events. EHA National also developed COVID-19 related infographics both independently and in partnership with ECU, and EHA accredited university. These infographics can be seen in the appendix of this report.

EHA encouraged all state/territory jurisdictions who had not already done so to authorise EHO's under respective jurisdictions legislation being utilised to manage COVID-19 through a public statement released early in April. EHA also recognised the existing positive relationship between the Queensland local government and State EHO's and commend them on their efforts in not only this pandemic but all recent disasters.

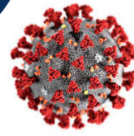
Information contained within this report is accurate as of 24th May 2020. EHA will continue to support our members in every state to protect the community through this pandemic.

Appendix

EHA independent infographics

COVID-19

Protect Yourself and Others



Use Soap and Water



Hand sanitiser is a 2nd best option for cleaning your hands. Soap and water is best.

Cover your Cough



Cough/sneeze into your elbow/a tissue to minimise spread of respiratory droplets.

'Wave don't shake'



To ensure social distancing greet each other with a wave instead of a hand shake.

Stay Home



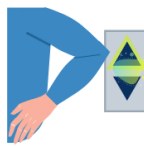
If you can work from home, do so.

Remote Learning



If children can be kept home, do so. Arrange for work to be available online/via email.

Public Surfaces



Avoid hand rails and use your elbow to press buttons.

Disinfect surfaces



Regularly wipe down and clean surfaces around the house using disposable wipes / paper towel.

Monitor Advice



Monitor health advice from the Australian Government at <https://bit.ly/2xrNunc>

Use Paywave

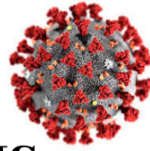


Shop staff should avoid handling customers cards / cash and encourage paywave .

Mask Usage



Only use a facial mask if you are sick. They are not effective in preventing infection.




COVID-19 MYTHS

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ/HEAR


All information referenced from the World Health Organisation and Australian Government Department of Health

There is currently NO evidence to support a direct link between use of ibuprofen (contained in Nurofen and anti inflammatory medications) and more severe infection with COVID-19. **Only use as directed.**

IBUPROFEN




MOSQUITOES



There is NO current evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through mosquitoes. **Mosquitoes can transmit other illnesses and should be avoided.**

Taking a hot bath DOES NOT prevent COVID-19. Taking a hot bath with extremely hot water can cause harm. **Washing regularly in warm water is good personal hygiene.**

HOT BATHS




ALCOHOL / CHLORINE




Alcohol / chlorine will NOT kill viruses which have already entered your blood stream. Do NOT spray alcohol or chlorine over your body - this can be very harmful and cause irritation. **EHA recommends using only approved products as per manufacturers guidelines.**

There is NO vaccine against COVID-19 at this time; vaccines for pneumonia (such as pneumococcal / HIB) do not provide protection against new coronaviruses. **EHA encourages you to stay up to date with all vaccines.**

VACCINES



UV STERILISATION



UV lights should NOT be used to sterilise hands or other areas of skin as it may cause burns/irritation. **EHA recommends cleaning your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs**

ONLY THE ELDERLY

ALL age groups are being affected by COVID-19 and everyone should take steps to protect themselves and others. **EHA encourages physical distancing**





FLU SEASON FOOD SAFETY

INFORMATION VERIFIED BY THE AUSTRALIAN FOOD SAFETY COUNCIL



CLEAN & DRY HANDS

Regularly clean hands with soap to help remove viruses and bacteria. Dry hands are less likely to pick up viruses and bacteria so be sure to use a clean, dry towel and replace wet towels more often with increased hand washing. Wash used towels separately from laundry.

SHOPPING

DO NOT put unpackaged fresh fruit and veg directly into your trolley and **DO NOT** handle produce items and put them back for others. Shopping bags should **NOT** be placed on any food preparation benches and your hands should be washed immediately when you return home and again after putting away groceries.



DELIVERIES

Home deliveries can offer some protection by reducing contact with others. As with all you do at present, take precautions and wash your hands after handling the delivery.

FOOD PREPERATION

Wash your hands and clean benches and utensils regularly. Regularly was any towels used to wipe surfaces. **DO NOT** prepare food for other people if you are unwell. If you are the only available cook, eg a single parent, cook a frozen meal or something simple that requires minimal handling, or order a home delivered takeaway. Remember to cover all coughs and sneezes.

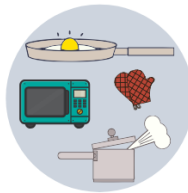


FRESH PRODUCE

Fresh fruit and vegetables should be washed under running water before eating. **DO NOT** use hand sanitiser or soap to clean produce. If you grow your own food, don't water it with 'grey' water.

STORING FOOD

Food can still be sold or eaten after its **best before** date but may have lost some nutrition or quality. Food **MUST** be used or frozen by its **use by date**. Follow any storage instructions on packaging and put newly purchased items at the back of the pantry / fridge so you use older items first.



COOKING

If you bulk cook food, divide the food into small containers so that it cools faster, label with the date, and refrigerate or freeze. Use any refrigerated food within 2 to 3 days or freeze it. It is safe to refreeze food that has been defrosted as long as it hasn't been left on the bench to defrost.

GUIDE TO PHYSICAL DISTANCING

As at 1st April 2020

Banned

Non essential gatherings of more than 2 people, this includes:

- Pubs, registered and licences clubs
- Gyms and indoor sporting venues
- Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos and night clubs
- Restaurants, cafes and food courts restricted to take away and/or home delivery only
- Weddings (5 people including couple, celebrant and witnesses)
- Religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals (funerals may have 10 people maximum)
- Real estate auctions and open houses
- Personal services (beauty, nail, waxing, tanning, tattoo)
- Spa and massage parlours
- Amusement parks, arcades and play centres
- Strip clubs, brothels and sex on premises venues
- Galleries, national institutions, museums, and historic sites
- Health clubs, fitness centres, yoga, barre and spin facilities,
- Saunas, bath houses, swimming pools and wellness centres
- Community halls, libraries, youth centres, RSL and PCYC
- Gaming and gambling venues
- Indoor and outdoor markets (states and territories will make their own announcements about food markets)
- Home entertaining including BBQ's and house parties



Limit / Caution

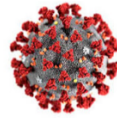
- Workplaces where you cannot work from home
- Health care settings and health related services
- Pharmacies
- Essential food shopping
- Schools and universities where you cannot study from home
- Public transport and airports



Safe

- Social apps, phone calls, video calls
- Reading
- Gardening
- At home exercise
- Bike riding
- Jogging/walking - maintaining 1.5m social distancing
- Home improvement
- Online learning
- Cooking
- Personal yoga/meditation





FOOD DELIVERY

GUIDANCE TO ENSURE YOU TRADE SAFELY

INFORMATION SOURCED FROM CIEH AND FOOD STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

Food Safety Standards

Safe Food Australia is a guide to the food safety standards.



<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/Pages/safefoodaustralia3rd16.aspx>

Allergies

Clearly state customers should ask about allergies/intolerance when ordering.



Clearly label allergy sufferers meal and prepare/transport separately to other food.



Food Packaging

All food packaging must be clean, suitable for food use and comply with the Australian law.



Disposable containers and packaging is recommended.



Delivery Boxes/Bags

Two stage cleaning should be used to disinfect carriers internally and externally at the beginning of the day and before/after carrying food.



Hot food should be provided at 60 C or above and cold food 5 C or below.



Drivers

Drivers must have insurance for business and be given basic induction on safe food handling etc.



Drivers must be provided with alcohol hand sanitiser (>60%) and wash hands before and after collection.



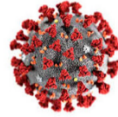
Pick-up / Drop-off

Orders should be placed at the customers door and the customer notified by the bell/knocking on the door.



Social distancing from the deliverer and customer must be observed at all times.





FOOD TAKE-AWAY

GUIDANCE TO ENSURE YOU TRADE SAFELY

INFORMATION SOURCED FROM CIEH AND FOOD STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

Safe Food Procedures

Your Food Safety Management System will need to be updated if any normal cooking processes have changed to provide take-away/delivered food.



It is recommended food is offered cooked and ready to eat.



Physical Distancing

A minimum 1.5m physical distancing must be observed; this includes kitchen staff, front of house, lunch rooms and with customers.



Ensure all staff understand what is expected of them.

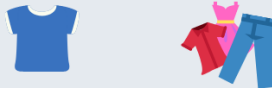


Laundry

Uniforms should be washed above 60°C and with laundry sanitising agents. Ensure staff wear clean uniforms every shift.

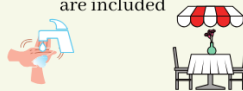


Staff washing uniforms at home should wash and store uniforms separately to other laundry.



Cleanliness

Increase frequency of hand washing and disinfection. Ensure all high-touch surfaces (chairs, tables, handles etc.) are included

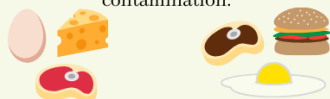


All high touch surfaces should be disinfected at the beginning and completion of the shift.



Safe cooking & Holding

Ensure separation of raw and cooked foods and do not allow cross contamination.



Stored hot food must be kept above 60°C and cold food below 5°C.



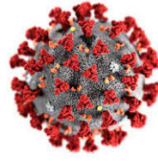
Alcohol

You may only provide take-away alcohol if your premises licence permits.



Always check ID and do not provide to minors.





COVID-19

SAFE SHOPPING

GUIDANCE TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS WHEN SHOPPING FOR ESSENTIALS

BEFORE SHOPPING

Ask yourself

Do I feel unwell?

Could someone shop for me?

Is this essential?

Is there a quiet local shop I can go to?

Do I really need to shop now?

Could I bake my own food/bread?

Can someone look after the children so they don't have to come with me?

Can I shop online?

Am I in contact with at risk groups?

Disinfect all kitchen surfaces and shelves



DURING SHOPPING

1.5m Apart

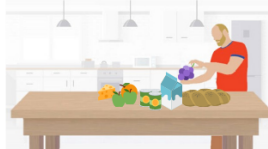
Sanitise

Avoid contact with surfaces as much as possible, this includes picking up an item and returning it to the shelf.

Use your non-dominant hand to pick up goods and minimise contamination of your hands.

AFTER SHOPPING

Unpack groceries on a designated disinfected area. Avoid putting food bags on counter tops.



If shopping for someone else, leave groceries on the front door & maintain social distancing.



Wipe down packaged goods with warm, soapy water or leave in a safe place for 72 hours. Always wash hands after handling groceries.



STOP THE SPREAD

Stay Home



Make arrangements to work from home

Good Hygiene



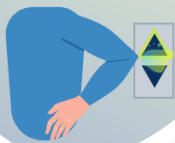
Wash your hands regularly with soap and water

STOP
SANTITISE
WASH

Surfaces



Regularly wipe down and clean surfaces around the house using disposable wipes / paper towel.
Avoid touching public surfaces.



'Wave don't shake'



To ensure social distancing greet each other with a wave instead of a hand shake.

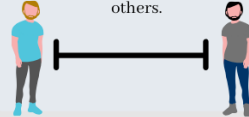
SOCIAL DISTANCING

What does it mean?

Stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary and limit visitors.



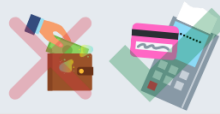
Keep 1.5 metres away from others.



Avoid physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs and kisses.



Use tap and pay instead of cash.



Avoid public places.



Avoid public gatherings and at risk groups.



If caring for a sick person: keep them in one room of the house and avoid contact with others in the house.



Use video chats and phone calls to stay in touch with others.



Why does it matter?

Why should I social distance? *I'm not at risk.*



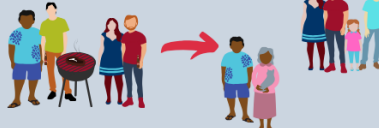
Although the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions are most at risk, every age group can and has been affected by COVID-19.

Why should I social distance? *I feel fine.*



Some people who have COVID-19 do not have any symptoms but can still pass on the virus to others through every day activities.

Why should I social distance? *I don't interact with the sick/elderly.*



You can indirectly interact with those most at risk in public places / at gatherings. Remember ANYONE can be affected by COVID-19.

HEALTH ADVICE FOR Food Providers

Health and hygiene is a top priority.

Clean Hands.



Wash hands before starting work and handling food. Also after handling, waste, cleaning, using the toilet, blowing your nose, sneezing, coughing, drinking, smoking.

Contact Free Payments



Encourage payment using Tap & Go and sanitise Eftpos machines after each keypad use with alcohol wipes

Take-away / Delivery



Orders can be handled by staff wearing gloves.
Provide ample space for customers to wait for their orders (social distancing 1.5m).
Delivery Orders can be dropped at customers doorsteps to avoid interaction with the driver