

COVID-19

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

for building & construction

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Please note this is a best practice guide only

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**Master
Builders
Association**
New South Wales



The law

Under Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws employers have a duty of care for the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes:

- Providing and maintaining a work environment without risk to health and safety, and
- Providing and maintaining adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work.

As an employer / person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) you must identify risks at the workplace (in consultation with all interested parties), and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks to as low as is reasonably practicable.

The risk

People in the building and construction industry are at risk of exposure to COVID-19.

As a PCBU, you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workers a safe distance apart.

Control measures need to be implemented that mitigate risks associated with exposure to COVID-19.





Best Practice Guide

This Guide has been developed by the Master Builders Association of NSW. It is regularly updated to reflect the latest Government announcements and directions from NSW Health. The purpose of this Guide for the building and construction industry in NSW, is to:

- Provide direction to employers and workers
- Outline the steps to provide a safe workplace in the current COVID-19 environment.

Construction site definition

A construction site is a place at which work, including related excavation, is being carried out to erect, demolish, extend or alter a building or structure, or at which civil works are being carried out, but not work carried out in relation to a dwelling in which a person is residing.

Who can work on a construction site in Greater Sydney?

As from 22 August 2021, all construction workers are permitted to work on construction sites in Greater Sydney, including in LGAs of concern. Please be aware that a construction site in the Central Coast or Shellharbour local government areas is no longer a construction site in Greater Sydney. These are now construction sites in regional and rural NSW.

Construction workers from LGAs of concern are listed as authorised workers and permitted to leave their local area for work if they meet the vaccination conditions.

Construction workers are defined as anyone who works on a construction site. This would include accredited or specialised workers.



Residential work

Prescribed works* in occupied residential dwellings is permitted in Greater Sydney and regional NSW, except in the LGAs of concern.

There are different restrictions in place for renovations, repairs, maintenance and cleaning of homes. These are not permitted within LGAs of concern unless they are “necessary” (for example, the work is urgently required), or, the work is in an outdoor area with no more than 5 workers.

Works taking place in an unoccupied unit in an otherwise occupied residential building should adhere to the rules for occupied residential premises.

This includes limits of two workers for indoor services and five for outdoor services. Always wear a mask and minimise time spent in any indoor common area.

Workers in residential apartment buildings should contact the Owners Corporation or Strata Manager to check any additional rules which may apply to a particular residential apartment building for access.

Capacity limits

If you are doing prescribed work* at a home, you must ensure that:

- no more than 2 people are working in an indoor area at the same time;
- a resident must stay in a separate indoor area to where the work is being carried out
- no more than 5 people are working in an outdoor area at the same time.

If you are doing prescribed work at a unit within a residential apartment building, you must ensure that:

- no more than 2 people are working inside a unit at the same time
- a resident should stay in a separate indoor area to where the work is being carried out in their unit and
- no more than 5 people are working in an outdoor area at the same time.

*Prescribed work is renovation (alterations or additions), repair, maintenance or cleaning work. This includes maintenance services such as gardening, swimming pool, and pest control services.

MANAGING THE RISK

Screening workers

To minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on site, employers should implement a screening process. Each worker must provide a declaration that, to the best of their knowledge, they:

- Are free of COVID-19 symptoms
- Have not, in the preceding 14 days been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Are not currently required to self isolate

In addition, if a worker has been in contact with anyone in their household who is currently being tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), or has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they are required to inform site management for further discussion.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms include:

- fever (37.5 degrees Celsius or higher)
- cough
- sore throat
- shortness of breath (difficulty breathing)
- runny nose
- loss of taste
- loss of smell.

Even if you only have one symptom, get tested and self-isolate immediately.

No person with any COVID-19 symptoms should come to work or be allowed on site.



COVID-19 Safety Plans

COVID-19 Safety Plans are **mandatory** for construction on any site that is not an occupied residence in Greater Sydney.

Note: A small construction site means a construction site where 10 people or less attend the site over any 24 hour period.

Construction setting	COVID-19 Safety Plan
Greater Sydney - any site that is not an occupied residence	Mandatory
Other construction and tradespeople	Recommended

A copy of the plan must be available for inspection on site.

These plans will be enforced through SafeWork NSW who conduct regular site inspections. Non-compliance can result in fines and other action, including the exclusion of workers from site.

The plan is available to be filled in as a web form on the [NSW Government website](#). Master Builders NSW has provided a completed '[sample](#)' [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) for members to review.

COVID-19 Safety Plans are recommended for construction sites outside of Greater Sydney, and for all construction, trade and home maintenance businesses.

The principal contractor or site occupier must complete the COVID-19 Safety Plan for construction sites in Greater Sydney. They are responsible for enforcing face mask requirements, physical distancing, testing and vaccination conditions.

Every construction site must have one nominated person and/or COVID Marshal who is responsible for ensuring compliance with all COVID-19 safety measures. They may ensure compliance across multiple sites for smaller projects.

It is an offence not to comply with the COVID-19 Safety Plans for construction sites under the [Public Health Order](#).



QR Codes

It is now mandatory for all businesses and workplaces to use the NSW Government QR code. It is required for every building site, with exceptions for some smaller “trades people only projects” in the residential sector.

The need for fast and accurate contact information for anyone who has visited a COVID-19 public exposure site is vital. The NSW Government QR code is the best way for NSW Health to expedite contact tracing in the event of an outbreak in the industry.

Q: How do I get my QR code?

A: You can find the application form and more information at [register for the NSW Government QR Code](#).

Q: What if I have multiple sites?

A: If you need to register 20 or more locations, [use the bulk upload request form](#).

Q: Can I get different QR codes for multiple business locations that are operating under the same ABN?

A: Yes, you can. Multiple business locations operating under the same ABN can all have unique QR codes. To get different QR codes for each business location, you need to register each location as COVID Safe. When registering the different locations, you must enter detailed business name and address details to define each business location. However, you can enter the same ABN for all locations if numerous locations operate under the one ABN. Following your registration, your unique, location specific QR codes will be sent to you by email.

Q: Can I use my own check-in system?

A: No, you can't use any alternative QR code systems to the NSW Government QR code.

Q: Do visitors and workers need to check out every time they leave the business location?

A: When leaving the site, visitors are encouraged to ‘check out now’ using the COVID Safe Check-in tool. Checking out is optional but does help with contact tracing.



COVID Vaccination

Construction workers from LGAs of concern must meet the vaccination conditions prior to working on any construction sites in Greater Sydney. From Wednesday 11 August, they must have received:

- two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, or
- one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine more than 21 days ago, or
- had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine within the previous 21 days and they have been tested for COVID-19 in the past 72 hours (three days), or
- evidence of a medical exemption and they have been tested for COVID-19 in the past 72 hours.

NSW Health has approved rapid antigen testing for implementation at worksites across NSW. A guidance document has been developed and can be found on the [NSW Government website](#). A person can attend a worksite whilst waiting for their surveillance test result.

A person from an affected LGA must meet the vaccination conditions to work on a construction site, even if the works are urgently required.

Construction workers on unoccupied sites are now considered authorised workers. This means construction workers from the affected LGAs of concern can work on unoccupied sites within their LGA or leave their LGA for work, but they must meet vaccination conditions as listed above.

The Public Health Order only allows the workers to leave for the purposes of work. That means when they are not working, all stay at home restrictions still apply.

Workers from the affected LGAs who do not meet the vaccination conditions may not attend a construction site for work, including a construction site in the LGA of their residence.

Workers outside the affected LGAs may travel into the LGAs for work and are not subject to vaccination requirements.



Delivery drivers to site

From 21st August 2021, any driver of a vehicle who resides in an affected LGA cannot enter a construction site unless they comply with COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

If as a driver you don't meet the requirements, you must not enter or remain at a construction site in Greater Sydney. This includes the delivery or removal of goods (including but not limited to supplies, plant and equipment, water or spoil).

Evidence of vaccination or exemption

You must:

- carry evidence of your vaccination, COVID-19 test, or medical exemption and
- produce that evidence to your employer, the occupier of a construction site, a police officer or an authorised officer, if requested and
- carry proof of your address.

Evidence of your vaccination can include:

- an [online immunisation history statement](#) or
- COVID-19 digital certificate from the [Australian Immunisation Register](#).

Evidence of your COVID-19 test can include an SMS text message or email from the testing organisation.

Evidence of your [medical exemption](#) must be from a medical practitioner in the form approved by the NSW Chief Health Officer.

Construction workers can request a COVID-19 vaccination exemption for medical reasons. Evidence of your medical exemption must be from a medical practitioner in the form approved by the NSW Chief Health Officer.



1.5m

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres should be implemented wherever possible. Employers should consider each work task and whether there is a safe alternative way to undertake the work with an increased distance between workers.

- Mark safe distances in work, transit and break areas (eg on floors and walls).
- Consider different shift patterns to minimise the number of workers onsite (eg AM/PM shifts, ensuring adequate time between shifts for cleaning and disinfecting).
- Stagger start times, breaks and finish times to avoid congestion in high traffic areas and minimise workers coming into contact with each other as they move around the site.
- Plan for how physical distancing will be maintained during inclement weather (eg use of lunch or crib rooms and amenities).
- Install temporary physical barriers (eg fences, screens) between work areas, where appropriate.
- Lunchrooms pose a particular risk as they are often indoors, where people congregate in a confined area food and drink and shelter from the elements (inclement weather conditions). The following would apply:
 - Suggest lunch breaks are staggered
 - Limit the number of people in a meal area at any time
 - Wherever possible, create additional meal areas to reduce the number of people gathering.
 - Provide extra facilities to mitigate workers moving outside designated zones.
 - Additional meal areas should be in outdoor or fresh air environments wherever possible. This might include well ventilated areas, or on levels of buildings that are structurally sound and otherwise safe, but open to fresh air

Where essential work activities need to be undertaken in restricted spaces (eg lift shafts, personnel hoists, lifts), the number of workers working in the space should be minimised.

Ensure that workers maintain physical distancing outside the work site if it is necessary to leave the site and return, for example to purchase supplies, meal breaks or attend meetings.





Density Quotients

From 11 August 2021, construction sites that are permitted to operate in Greater Sydney can have the lesser of:

- 1 person per 4 square metres of space at the construction site; or
- 50% of the maximum daily workforce.

The maximum daily workforce is the maximum number of workers on site on any day from the start to the end of the project. Staff who primarily work in office locations not attached to a construction site, such as administrative staff, are excluded from these calculations. However, employers must allow workers to work from home.

How to calculate 50% of the maximum daily workforce:

1. Calculate the normal daily number of workers that would be on site over the full length of the project based on your current resourcing plan.
2. Estimate the day when the site will have the maximum amount of trades and construction workers.
3. Take that number of workers and halve to get 50% of maximum daily workforce.

The current resourcing plan is the one that applied to the construction site on 31 July 2021 or, if there was no plan on that date, the resourcing plan that applies on the day on which work commences on the construction site.

Construction sites in regional and rural NSW (including affected areas of regional and rural NSW) can have the greater of either 1 person per 4m² at the site or a maximum of 25 persons at the site at any one time.





Hygiene

Good hygiene practices and general cleaning helps with minimising the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Employers should review general hygiene requirements and the cleaning regimes in place.

Employers should display health information (including appropriate messaging for cultural and linguistically disadvantaged workers) in prominent locations on the construction site such as tea rooms, site offices, toilets, foyers, lifts and site entrances.

You must direct your workers and visitors to practice good hygiene while at the workplace. This should include:

- Promote regular hand washing with soap for at least 20 seconds. Employers must facilitate regular hand washing by providing ease of access and additional facilities where possible.
 - Paper towels are preferable as they reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by drying the hands more thoroughly than hand dryers.
- Communicate to all workers where hand sanitisers are located and encourage their regular use. An alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the active ingredient must be used as per the manufacturer's instructions when it is not possible to wash and dry hands.
- Promoting good cough etiquette - cover coughs and sneezes with elbow or a clean tissue (and no spitting).
- Avoid touching your nose, eyes or mouth.
- Provide hand sanitiser and/or hand washing facilities with soap in all site entrances and exits hoists, amenities and areas/levels of the site.
- Ensure that workers maintain good hygiene if it is necessary to leave the site and return, for example to purchase supplies, meal breaks or to attend meetings.
- Have no intentional physical contact, for example, shaking hands and patting backs.
- Do not share personal items such as cigarette lighters, phones etc





Shared tools and equipment

Workers should avoid the shared use of tools, plant and equipment wherever possible. If it isn't possible to eliminate shared use:

- Provide cleaning products (eg alcohol spray or solution) where communal tools, plant and equipment are located.
- Keep cleaning products with tools, plant and equipment as they move around the site.
- Ensure all operators thoroughly wash or sanitise their hands before and after every use.
- Ensure all parts of tools, plant and equipment (eg including handles, handrails) are wiped down before and after use.

The shared use of phones, desks, offices, computers and other devices should be avoided. Where this is not possible, these items should be regularly disinfected.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces is to be conducted using cleaning products to reduce coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission.

- Cleaning and disinfection of amenities and meal areas must occur between work group breaks.
- Cleaning and disinfection of personnel hoists should occur at the end of each hoist operator shift.
- Routine cleaning of 'frequently touched surfaces', surfaces such as toilets, door handles, stair handrails, light switches, lift buttons, table tops. At a minimum, frequently touched surfaces workplaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least once daily.

A disinfectant containing alcohol (at a concentration of 70% or more), quaternary ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach should be used. See the [Department of Health website](#) for more information on achieving the correct bleach solution.

Guidance on how to clean your worksite to keep it safe and limit the spread of COVID-19 can be found [here](#).



Hoists and lifts

Workers using hoists and lifts may be at increased risk of exposure to Covid-19 because they are required to be in close proximity to others and potentially contaminated surfaces so extra care needs to be taken. Control measures to reduce the risk should include:

- Limiting worker movement between levels and floors on site, where it is possible and safe to do so.
- Limit the need to use hoists by assigning teams to particular floors or areas for their shift.
- As far as possible, do not mix between teams in hoists and lifts.
- PPE (face masks) must be provided and worn in hoists and lifts.
- Physical distancing of 1.5 m and hygiene systems to be followed when waiting for hoists and lifts, particularly on floors where worker volumes may increase during peak times (start, break, finish times). For example the ground floor, floors with meal or break out spaces and floors with bathroom amenities.
- During peak periods have systems in place to limit crowding of workers entering/exiting the work area. For example:
 - Developing a schedule for use of the hoist/lift.
 - Staggering what floors workers are to use the hoist/lift.

Face masks

Employers should ensure that an adequate supply of suitable face masks is available for use and provision is made for appropriate disposal of disposable face masks. Masks must be worn by construction workers both indoors and outdoors in NSW and it should be a fitted face covering over both the nose and mouth. Workers may remove a mask in certain circumstances, including:

- when eating or drinking
- if the nature of the person's work: (i) makes the wearing of a fitted face covering a risk to the person's, or another person's health and safety, or (ii) means clear enunciation or visibility of the person's mouth is essential
- because of an emergency

NOTE: The requirement to wear a mask does not apply to a person with a physical or mental health illness or condition, or a disability, that makes wearing a mask unsuitable. See the requirements for providing proof of exemption for not wearing a mask.

Common areas

Common areas on sites such as the amenities and frequently touched surfaces pose risks, and these are reduced by ensuring the following measures are adopted. All frequently touched surfaces and equipment on site need to be wiped down with appropriate cleaning and sanitizing disinfectants.

Sanitisers or disinfectant wipes should be readily available near frequent use appliances such as fridges, microwaves, drinking fountains etc.

The time spent in those areas must be limited. Staggering of meal breaks and separation of work groups to achieve maximum personal space and reduce the number of workers accessing those areas at any one time consistent with the NSW Government's density quotient.

Cleaning and sanitisation must occur between occupation of amenities by different work groups.

Where practical, workforce amenities should be placed at different levels of multi level building sites.

In the event of inclement weather and potential congestion in amenities, consultation must occur in relation to relocation or other options.

Adequate ventilation and air flow should be maintained in enclosed amenities, for example by opening windows/doors to allow fresh air, installing fans and/or exhaust fans, turning air conditioners to 'fresh' not recirculate.

COVID Marshalls

It is recommended that on large construction sites a COVID Marshal is appointed by the principle contractor. COVID Marshalls will help:

- Monitor entry points and levels/areas to ensure compliance.
- Monitor workers health and wellbeing (and have the authority to take action).
- Ensure workers practice appropriate physical distancing measures
- Ensure adequate ventilation

Contractors can appoint multiple COVID Marshalls. The role does not need to be a single dedicated appointment, however, the COVID Marshal role should be their primary role when on duty.



Further information

Construction sites are diverse and vary in complexity, employers must apply a risk-based approach and implement reasonably practical controls based on the environment and specific hazards at each construction site.

For more information see the following resources:

- National Coronavirus Health Information line: 1800 020 080
- NSW Health Website – COVID-19 (Coronavirus): [NSW Department of Health – Coronavirus FAQ's](#)
- Master Builders NSW COVID-19 Information webpage: www.mbansw.asn.au/covid19
- [Safe Work Australia](#)