

Coronavirus response measures must consider health and safety of workers

Workers across many industries are at the forefront of our coordinated national response to the emerging Coronavirus.

A principal focus in this response should be on ensuring the health and wellbeing of workers, particularly in sectors such as health, transport and education.

Accurate information about the virus, and access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is critical, particularly in areas with greater potential of exposure.

More information is currently being sought about guidelines for provision of appropriate PPE.

While state and federal governments are responsible for national control measures, all workers – and their health and safety representatives – can have a major say on workplace control measures to reduce the potential for infection.

The Queensland WHS ACT 2011 outlines the primary duty of care of a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) who must ensure that the health of all workers and the conditions at the workplace are monitored for the purpose of preventing illness or injury of workers.



Under Queensland law, consultation on workplace health and safety matters is required and the PCBU must consult with workers when considering measures to minimise or eliminate the potential for exposure to the virus. Remember the laws stipulate that all workers must be provided with a safe

working environment. Notify your PCBU if you believe your workplace does not have effective control measures in place.

Health workers are at the centre of measures to control spread of Coronavirus and should be vigilant about protocols for dealing with disease.

Support for Workplace Health and Safety Reps

Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) are an essential part of your workplace health and safety.

If your workplace doesn't have trained HSRs or has any workplace health and safety concerns workers can receive advice through the HSR Support Service.

Contact Service Coordinator
Damien McGarry on:

(07) 3010 2555

info@hsrsupport.org.au

www.hsrsupport.org.au

Latest fatality statistics by industry

The final number of fatalities notified to the national body for the 2019 calendar year was 166.

The final update to the national statistics for the number of workers killed around Australia in 2019 is also available on the Safe Work website.

The workers killed last year were from the following industries:

- » 60 in Transport, postal & warehousing (eight more since last update)
- » 33 in Agriculture, forestry & fishing
- » 24 in Construction
- » 10 in Public Administration & safety

- » 9 in Mining
- » 8 in Manufacturing
- » 7 in Electricity, gas, water & waste services
- » 6 in 'Other services'
- » 4 in Arts & recreation services
- » 2 in Professional, scientific & technical services
- » 1 in Wholesale trade
- » 1 in Administration & support services
- » 1 in Healthcare & social assistance

Source: Safe Work Australia

Safety in Short

Injured workers often experience secondary mental health impacts

One in three injured Australian workers experience serious secondary mental illnesses, however few access mental health services that could accelerate their recovery and return to work, according to a joint Australian/Canadian study.

The findings, published by BMJ, emphasise the importance of post-injury mental health screening, referral and treatment.

The study of 615 Victorian workers who made a workers' comp claim for musculoskeletal injuries through WorkSafe Victoria between 2014 and 2015, found 181 met the threshold for being assessed as having a serious mental illness in the 12 months after injury. Of those, only 41 per cent accessed a mental health service, like psychological counselling, psychiatry services or antidepressant and anti-anxiety medication, through the workers' comp system.



Queensland has an independent support service

for workers who are experiencing a work-related psychological injury, or who have developed a mental health issue arising from the impact of a psychological workplace injury.

The WPSS is free of charge, and can be contacted on 1800 370 732, via email at info@wpss.org.au, or visit www.wpss.org.au for more information.

Welders face pneumonia risks

International researchers from Europe, South Africa and the US have found that exposure to metal fumes not only increases the risk of welders contracting pneumonia but also increases their risk of contracting invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD).

They studied 4438 cases aged 20–65 from a Swedish registry of invasive infection caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, applied controls and linked these to socioeconomic status, occupational history and medical records.

Ladder order issue raises ongoing workplace hazards

The October issue of the HSR News outlined a workplace issue regarding the use of ladders, and workers being forced to perform a duty where the PCBU had failed in their obligations to identify, eliminate or minimise potential hazards.

The Health and Safety Rep assisted the manager in question and provided practical solutions to overcome the failure of managing the risk of a fall from one level to another.

Unfortunately after consultation had occurred the manager decided he would move away from the agreed position and attempted to order workers to use ladders unless they had a

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with HSR Support Service
Coordinator Damien McGarry

doctor's certificate to prove otherwise.

This is not consistent with the WHS Act and an unreasonable approach, considering that consultation, representation and participation must occur in relation to health and safety matters. Due to the unreasonable behavior displayed by the manager the HSR was advised to place a provisional improvement notice (PIN) on the manager in question under the WHS Act.

Once the PIN was issued things began to change and the

correct consultative processes were undertaken.

A meeting was organised. Subsequently appropriate training and a safe system of work to control the risk of a fall from heights is now in place.

The unreasonable behavior of the manager ordering people to perform unsafe duties also highlighted another workplace health issue - ensuring a safe system to eliminate work-related psychological hazards.

Great work by the HSR who has a good understanding of WHS laws, and the obligations of the employer to eliminate risks to health and safety.

Queensland silicosis cases double

The media has been reporting that the rate of silicosis being detected in Queensland stonemasons has nearly doubled in the past year.

While it is feared that thousands of stonemasons around Australia may have contracted the disease, a cluster was discovered in Queensland in 2018 which triggered a state-wide audit.

At this stage 186 stonemasons, or nearly 20 per cent of the industry, have been diagnosed.

The majority of those

diagnosed are between 22 and 45 years of age.

As a result of this emerging crisis, the federal government last year established a 'dust diseases task-force'.

The final report is expected to be provided to the Health Minister by December this year.

“ At this stage, 186 stonemasons, or nearly 20 per cent of the industry, have been diagnosed. ”

Meanwhile, the Queensland government is about to begin another round of audits to ensure that businesses are complying with the new code of practice which was introduced to make the work safer.

Ensure your workplace is complying with their obligations and managing the risk of dust exposure.

Google “[worksafe qld silica dust exposure](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/silica-dust-exposure)” for the latest Code of Practice or phone the HSR Support Service on 07 3010 2555.