

# Keeping WHS a priority in your workplace

*Things workplaces can do to keep work health and safety a priority.*



The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for employers and workers.

Workplaces have faced new work health and safety (WHS) risks and have had to re-assess, review and implement new or different risk management practices, often in a short timeframe. They have also had to consider the psychological effects of COVID-19.

This information sheet provides guidance on how you can continue to model best practice WHS through COVID-19 and beyond, regardless of the size of your business, or the industry you work in.

## Remember your duties under the WHS laws

- **Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)**—a company or individuals who are responsible for running a business or workplace. A PCBU has the primary duty of care to ensure the health and safety of its workers and that other people are not put at risk from its work, so far as is reasonably practicable. PCBUs also have duties relating to consultation and training.
- **Officers**—anyone who makes significant decisions at work. Officers have a duty to exercise due diligence to ensure that the PCBU complies with their duties.
- **Workers**—anyone who carries out work for a business or workplace. Workers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and ensure their actions do not negatively affect the health and safety of others. They must comply with reasonable instructions, policies and procedures relating to health and safety as much as possible.

- **Other persons at the workplace**—including visitors—have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and ensure their actions do not negatively affect the health and safety of others. They must comply with safety instructions as much as possible.

## Undertake continuous risk management

Managing WHS risks is an ongoing process.

Workplaces must assess the physical and psychological risks associated with day to day work and the work environment and implement control measures to manage these risks.

Risk management involves four steps:

1. **Identify hazards**—find out what could cause harm.
2. **Assess risks**—understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening.
3. **Control risks**—implement the most effective control measure that is reasonably practicable in the circumstances and ensure it remains effective over time.
4. **Review** hazards and control measures to ensure they are working as planned.

Read more about the risk assessment process in the [model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#).

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**Together, we can create safer workplaces for everyone.**

Find out more at [safeworkmonth.swa.gov.au](https://safeworkmonth.swa.gov.au) or go to [swa.gov.au/coronavirus](https://swa.gov.au/coronavirus).

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## Consider mental health

WHS laws apply to managing risks to psychological (mental) health as well as physical risks. Psychological hazards include high or low job demand, poor support, exposure to violence or aggression, isolated or remote work and poor workplace relationships.

You can apply the same four step risk management process for identifying and managing [psychological hazards](#).

## Consult with workers

PCBUs must consult with workers on WHS matters and give workers the opportunity to express their views on WHS issues, including when:

- assessing the risks that the work or workplace present to the health and safety of workers
- deciding on control measures to eliminate or minimise these risks
- deciding on the adequacy of facilities for the welfare of workers, and
- proposing changes to the workplace which may affect health and safety (for example implementing new or revised WHS policies and making decisions about work arrangements).

The [model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#) provides more information about your duties to consult.

## Design good work

Considering health and safety issues when first designing how your business will work can help to eliminate hazards and manage risks. Effective design of good work can radically transform the workplace in ways that benefit the business, workers, clients and others in the supply chain.

Good work design considers:

- the work and work systems  
*task duration and complexity, and the physical and mental demands of the task*
- the physical working environment  
*the equipment and materials used, and the structure that is the workplace*
- the workers  
*physical, emotional and mental capacities and needs.*

Considering these things can help improve performance, job satisfaction and productivity. Learn more in the [Principles of good work design: A work health and safety handbook](#).

## Are you a small business?

The guidance in this information sheet is relevant to you too.

Small businesses have faced particularly difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic, managing the risks of exposure to COVID-19 whilst working to keep their business open and retain staff.

Some small businesses have had to close their doors for an extended period, with some being able to re-open, while others have been forced to close. Many have had to completely change their business model and learn to work in ways they've never had to before. All these factors can cause feelings of stress, anxiety and confusion. It's very important to look after your and your workers' mental health during this time.

There are various resources specific to small business that can assist:

- [Safe Work Australia's COVID-19 small business hub](#)—includes tailored information, videos and tools relating to WHS and COVID-19.
- [Safe Work Australia's COVID-19 small business planning tool](#)—outlines key steps and considerations when operating your small business during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Ahead for business](#)—provides help for small business owners, including mental health advice.
- [Business.gov.au](#)—provides COVID-19 information and support for business, including sole traders.
- [Business Connect online toolkit](#)—provides webinars, fact sheets and training videos to help small businesses navigate COVID-19.