



Department of Health – Pandemic guidance document for non-health businesses, organisations and agencies

These guidelines support non-health businesses, organisations and agencies to develop and maintain internal plans to protect the health and safety of their workforce and the community during a human pandemic, while supporting continuity of essential operations. As the specific characteristics of a future pandemic pathogen (e.g. virus or bacteria) cannot be known in advance, this document provides general preparedness principles only. Specific guidance – such as infection prevention and control advice, vaccination requirements, isolation and quarantine requirements, testing approaches, and other public health and social measures – will be provided by the Western Australian Department of Health once the disease is identified and a pandemic is declared.

Advice provided during a pandemic is likely to evolve as new evidence emerges and the situation develops. Agencies should establish processes to regularly review WA Department of Health updates, recognising that while some general preparedness principles remain stable, disease-specific requirements may change rapidly throughout an incident.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides useful insights into the types of operational and workforce challenges that may recur. However, it is important to note that future pandemics may behave very differently to COVID-19 and could have greater severity, transmissibility or operational impacts. Measures successfully applied during the COVID-19 pandemic in Western Australia, particularly during the period before widespread vaccination coverage was achieved in the community, may not necessarily be appropriate or sufficient for future incidents.

Guidance for businesses, organisations and agencies

Health and safety measures

The types of health and safety measures required in a pandemic will depend on how the disease spreads. For example, diseases may be spread through:

- contact with contaminated hands, clothing or surfaces
- droplets, which can land on the eyes, nose or mouth during coughing, sneezing or close interaction
- aerosols, where infectious particles remain suspended in the air over time and distance.

As the disease causing a future pandemic cannot be known in advance, the WA Department of Health will provide more specific health and safety guidance and advice once the disease is identified and its transmission route is better understood, most likely in the form of online fact sheets and regular updates. Prior to a pandemic, and as part of general preparedness, businesses, organisations and agencies should:

- implement regular [cleaning](#) and disinfection of equipment and premises, focusing on frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, keyboards and phones
- promote [hand hygiene](#), respiratory etiquette (e.g. covering coughs and sneezes), and staying home when unwell, which are often among the most effective ways to reduce spread of disease
- ensure access to hand hygiene facilities, [alcohol-based hand sanitiser](#), and personal protective equipment where advised
- follow physical distancing, occupancy limits, and other public health and social measures as advised

- implement health screening, testing or exclusion measures as advised by the WA Department of Health
- follow vaccination requirements as outlined by the WA Department of Health
- implement and maintain record-keeping practices (e.g. visitor logs, seating plans) to support public health contact tracing requests
- consider optimising indoor natural and/or mechanical ventilation to the workplace.

Remote work and workforce management

Remote work will not be feasible for all sectors – particularly those requiring specialised equipment, controlled environments or site-based operations. Additionally, travel or movement restrictions may limit or prevent staff from attending workplaces. Businesses, organisation and agencies should:

- facilitate remote work where possible
- consider staggered shifts or alternative work patterns
- provide tools, systems and support to enable remote operations and staff working from home
- maintain clear communication channels and regular check-ins with staff
- plan for high absenteeism and compounding skills shortfalls, recognising that staff may be unwell, caring for family or household members, or required to isolate or quarantine.

While all workforces are important to the Western Australian community, the designation or “essential workers” will be determined by relevant authorities with the WA Department of Health supporting these sectors to safely continue operations.

Employee wellbeing and support

Pandemics can create prolonged stress and uncertainty for staff. Businesses, organisations and agencies should:

- provide access to mental health and wellbeing resources and support, such as Employee Assistance Schemes or community support agencies
- ensure staff are aware of leave entitlements and other supports
- offer flexible working hours and arrangements to support personal and family needs
- communicate clearly, consistently and transparently about workplace policies and updates. Consider nominating an organisational spokesperson, align messages with Department of Health advice, and set update frequency
- ensure two-way feedback mechanisms so that concerns and questions can be raised and addressed.

Business continuity planning

Business continuity strategies that consider the breadth of possible business impacts need to be investigated. Sound business continuity planning is essential before a pandemic occurs. The full range of potential disruptions should be considered, recognising that international, national or state-imposed restrictions may be activated with little notice resulting in supply challenges. Businesses, organisation and agencies should:

- develop and maintain a pandemic response plan
- identify critical functions and ensure contingencies for their continuation
- assess critical skills across business functions and build workforce capability accordingly (e.g. through cross-training)
- diversify supply chains to mitigate potential disruptions

- anticipate compounding disruptions, such as simultaneous supply chain issues, workforce gaps, equipment delays and/or travel restrictions
- plan for the possibility that public health response measures may require temporary business closure to reduce disease transmission.

Sector and industry coordination

Industry peak bodies are valuable sources of sector-specific, operationally relevant information. The Department of Health engages with sector representatives when developing industry-specific pandemic advice. Businesses, organisation and agencies should:

- maintain links with sector peak bodies for ongoing guidance
- share pandemic plans with staff (particularly leadership teams) and test assumptions through exercises to ensure they are realistic and fit-for-purpose.

Government agency actions

Understanding the likely actions of government agencies during a pandemic can help businesses, organisations and agencies develop practical and realistic pandemic plans. Regardless of the disease, it is expected that the following assumptions will apply:

- a large proportion, or all, of the population may initially be susceptible to the disease
- a vaccine is unlikely to be available during the first few months of the response
- movement, gathering or border restrictions may be required to limit entry to, or spread of the disease within, Australia or Western Australia
- the disease may affect the population in a series of waves, affecting different locations at different times
- response measures will be adjusted as the characteristics of the disease become clearer and as the incident progresses.

The sections below outline categories of actions that government may take to support the pandemic response.

Public health and social measures

The severity and transmissibility of the disease will guide the scale and type of actions taken by the lead agency. Medical and public health advisors draw on a wide range of evidence including state, national and international expertise when forming recommendations, which may include:

- surveillance and case/contact management
- isolation, quarantine or movement restrictions
- testing and vaccination programs
- clinical guidance, treatment pathways.
- clear and consistent public health communication and messaging.

Support for businesses

Implemented measures aim to minimise the health impacts on the public, with the primary focus on reducing illness and saving lives. However, decisions that affect businesses and livelihoods are made with careful consideration, and it is acknowledged that they can introduce challenges or restrictions for businesses, organisations and the wider community. As the situation permits, and subject to the severity of response measures, state or federal governments may support economic recovery through:

- financial assistance or relief programs
- guidelines and resources for safe business operations

- facilitating access to personal protective equipment or other essential supplies.

Community support

The pandemic response may involve working with peak bodies, local governments, community services and non-government organisations to ensure appropriate community support arrangements are in place, including:

- targeted support for vulnerable populations
- mental health resources and support services.

Communication and coordination:

A pandemic response requires clear, timely and transparent communication. The WA Department of Health and State agency representatives recognise the challenges and restrictions that are requested of the public and businesses. These public health measures implemented are designed to minimise the health impact to the public primarily saving lives and reducing illness.

The pace and changing situation with pandemics do result in the need to frequently update the public on what is known and what is being done to manage the pandemic incident. The WA Department of Health will:

- coordinate with international, national and local agencies
- provide updated public health advice as the incident evolves
- use public health surveillance data, modelling and technology to support decision-making and public communication.

Checklist

The information provided in this document is intended to help businesses, organisations and agencies develop a pandemic preparedness plan before an incident occurs. By applying these guiding principles, businesses can establish a solid planning framework, which can then be supplemented with disease-specific requirements as they are issued by the WA Department of Health.

Action	Date started	Date finalised	Complete	Notes
Health and safety measures				
Implement regular cleaning and disinfection of equipment and premises			☐	
Promote hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and staying home when unwell			☐	
Ensure access to hand hygiene facilities, alcohol-based hand sanitisers and personal protective equipment			☐	
Follow physical distancing, occupancy limits, and other public health and social measures as advised			☐	
Implement health screening, testing or exclusion measures as advised by the Department of Health			☐	
Follow vaccination requirements as advised by the Department of Health			☐	
Implement and maintain record-keeping practices (e.g. visitor logs, seating plans)			☐	
Remote work and workforce management				
Facilitate remote work where possible			☐	
Consider staggered shifts or alternative work patterns			☐	
Provide tools, systems and support to enable remote operations and staff working from home			☐	
Maintain clear communication channels and regular check-ins with staff			☐	
Plan for high absenteeism and compounding skills shortfalls			☐	
Employee wellbeing and support				
Provide access to mental health and wellbeing resources and support			☐	
Ensure staff are aware of leave entitlements and other supports			☐	
Offer flexible working hours and arrangements to support personal and family needs			☐	
Communicate clearly, consistently and transparently about workplace policies and updates			☐	
Ensure two-way feedback mechanisms so that concerns and questions can be raised and addressed			☐	
Business continuity planning				
Develop and maintain a pandemic response plan			☐	
Identify critical functions and ensure contingencies for their continuation			☐	

Action	Date started	Date finalised	Complete	Notes
Assess critical skills across business functions and build workforce capability accordingly			☐	
Diversify supply chains to mitigate potential disruptions			☐	
Anticipate compounding disruptions			☐	
Plan for the possibility that public health response measures may require temporary business closure			☐	
Other practices				
Maintain links with sector peak bodies for ongoing guidance			☐	
Share pandemic plans with staff and test assumptions through exercises to ensure they are realistic and fit-for-purpose			☐	

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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