

## Resources sector – National COVID-19 protocols

### The national task

The resources sector joins with national governments and the community in working to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

The health, social and economic implications of the pandemic demand a united and determined industry commitment.

National Cabinet is seeking a national framework to ensure seamless and effective operation of essential mining and related-services functions.

For resources workers, commuting for work should be recognised as essential under state and territory laws.

These protocols represent industry's commitment to meet government's expectations of performance for essential services. They reinforce and operate concurrently with public health advice and have been written in consultation with all peak state and territory representative mining bodies and with the cooperation of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association.

Mining companies commit to developing and sustaining robust **COVID-19 management plans** (management plans).

Key suppliers will work to comply with plans and companies will assist them in this task.

These plans are based on the best official advice and designed to adapt with developments of that advice from the nation's public health officials.

Governments can rely on management plans when establishing mining under essential services provisions. Industry associations use their networks to convene meetings of companies and their external stakeholders to share knowledge and best practice and communicate this with government as well as provide a channel for official advice.

This will continue at a heightened rate over the coming months. All companies commit to consulting regularly with the communities in which they operate, including Traditional Owner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Companies will work to keep communities safe at the same time as providing essential support for those communities particularly in remote regions.

All companies will nominate a contact person for governments under these national protocols to relay information between governments, management and the workforce. At site, existing workplace health and safety officers will continue to play the leading role in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace.

Along with a strong residential workforce in regions, fly in fly out (FIFO) is essential to mining activities. FIFO will continue to operate for companies with strict adherence to these national principles and protocols.

## **Primary health and safety advice**

All management plans will reference the official advice contained within the National Guidelines developed in consultation with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia and endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

Companies will also follow the directions of state and territory medical authorities as these directions are provided and updated. This information is dynamic and will be consulted continuously to keep up with any changes. Accordingly, management plans will change with the advice at: <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm>

## **Education and communication**

The national health guidelines and specific state and territory health and medical directions are the primary guide to action. Companies will provide extensive and regular updates to employees from this source material on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in their communities through best practice health and hygiene practices and strategies to avoid contracting the virus and workplace controls.

Specifically:

- Information on health, hygiene and other controls will be integrated into site induction plans – for direct employees, contractors and suppliers
- Health and hygiene practices will be integrated into existing mandatory and voluntary education programs using the best available delivery mechanisms (leveraging existing computer-based training programs or paper-based methods, newsletters and emails).

Companies have regular meetings at site and via electronic means with their employees, contractors and key suppliers, to convey critical information including ‘tool box’ talks, start up meetings, site apps, videos and webinars. These will continue, subject to strict social distancing controls (physical separation, staggered starts etc.).

Companies develop response plans and decision trees in consultation with medical professionals. This will continue.

## **Families and mental health**

Protection against the pandemic comes from supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees, their families and communities.

Companies have a range of programs which are evolving to meet this challenge. Access to 24/7 Employee Assistance Programs via call centres will continue.

A consultative approach is vital to gaining the confidence of employees’ families and communities to achieve high levels of protection. This consultation can explore access to flexible work arrangements or other information as required.

Companies have built up internal capacity on mental health, particularly the deployment of mental health first training and first aiders (and some with dedicated onsite professionals).

The mining industry is a strong supporter of the ‘Mates in Mining’ mental health initiative which is continuing to provide advice and support during this period.

## **Travel and accommodation**

Testing arrangements and equipment are changing and evolving. Individual responsibility – monitoring health (including temperature and potential symptoms of themselves and those they live with), social distancing and self-isolation in the event of contact sources of infection – is the starting point for all Australians. Companies will work to support individuals to exercise this responsibility.

Workers will be required to declare that they have been fit and well for the last seven days; that they have not undertaken any high-risk activities (such as overseas travel or contact with infected persons), and that they undertake to notify the company if they become unwell or anyone that they live with becomes unwell.

These provisions are not dissimilar to practices required by immigration authorities or the Red Cross blood donation service.

Companies will work with public health authorities seeking to establish a 'care point' for rapid screening processes to greatly reduce the risk of an infected, asymptomatic individual from flying to another jurisdiction or to a remote location. This will be done to avoid an unnecessary burden on the public health system and will complement broader public health efforts.

Beyond these actions, companies will pursue best practice health and hygiene checks for flights and at the mine site.

Companies will work with each other and their key suppliers and through industry associations to pool resources at critical transfer points – specifically commercial airports, charter airports and regional centres

This includes access to nurses, para-medical staff, equipment for measuring temperature and, as technology improves, infection testing facilities.

Companies will continue discussions with airlines on establishment for resources employee/contractor only commercial flights (i.e.no other travellers) as well as examining increased charter flights in the medium term.

- Safety messages on charter flights can be expanded to include virus health and hygiene.
- Companies will implement social distancing in line with medical recommendations for both ground and air transport. Social distancing will be applied on flights.
- Non-essential work will be reduced (with working from home arrangements and split teams across the sector).
- Companies will undertake to examine reduction of interstate FIFO.
- Companies will keep track of workers travelling to site and what tasks they are performing. High-level information can be accessed by dedicated contact officers within companies.
- Longer shift cycles will be used to minimise travel frequency and to stagger arrival and departure of different teams (this will be done with due regard to other issues such as fatigue).

Within camps movement of workers will be staggered – such as meal times, access to facilities etc. to minimise contact:

- Implement specific controls around social distancing in camp accommodation (mess hall seating etc.)
- Companies will support state and territory governments' efforts to deploy testing facilities for the virus in major resources regions.

### **Safety at work**

Workplace health and safety education, training and procedures are integrated into mining workplaces. Companies are integrating health and hygiene education, training and practices into standard operations. This will continue to include:

- Senior managers and health and safety officers addressing crews locally at shift change meetings with updated information regarding COVID-19

- All employees exercising social distancing while awaiting transport to site
- Residential workforces using their own vehicles to get to site. No sharing of company vehicles in transit by residential workforce. Site travelling (passenger vehicles) to have reference to health and medical guidelines on contact limits
- Vehicles cleaned between use by different groups
- Ensure that village cleaning meets applicable Australian Standards using suitably trained staff and consumables
- Extensive workplace hygiene practices – hand washing, social distancing, ban on non-essential travel and meetings, physical separation of teams and shift change over
- Extensive distribution of hand sanitizers backed with workplace education campaign  
Vulnerable employees working from home
- Physical separation between teams at worksites (workplaces, meals etc.), while travelling, and between shift (at change over)
- Must have the ability to isolate suspected and confirmed cases and special evacuation arrangements
- Workers with specific or legislative safety roles kept separated where safety permits
- Distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Increased cleaning and sanitising of sites, multiple time per shift for high use areas such as crib rooms and ablution facilities
- Dedicated cleaning staff undertaking specific activities such as providing special attention to wiping down hard surfaces
- Promote use of new or existing hotline services for reporting of anomalies.

Companies will also voluntarily assist local communities with equipment, particularly personal protective equipment (PPE).

#### **In the event of an incident**

Companies undertake to notify authorities of any COVID-19 illness (as per their state/territory requirements) where there is a risk of further transmission in the workplace or where it is believed transmission occurred in the workplace, such as in company health care workers managing suspected and proven cases, or close work contacts of known cases.

- Rapid information sharing is vital for the health of the entire community
- Provision of self-isolation or quarantine medical facilities
- Isolation and case tracking in the event of incidents
- Individual states/territories will have particular regional areas where industry will work with governments to provide appropriate response for individuals who are infected
- Protocols can be developed with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and charter operators for safe removal of staff.

Companies are reviewing their contingency plans in light of new information and with reference to the National Guidelines developed in consultation with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia and endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

## **Critical suppliers and contractors**

Mining operations rely on array of specialists and suppliers, some of whom are integral to daily operations, and some who have less frequent engagement with the site.

This includes explosives, drill and blasting providers, maintenance workers, equipment technicians who deploy specialised equipment or development projects (such as shifting long wall operations or preparing new seams).

Related workers may provide ongoing maintenance of allied services (health, electricity, water, and emergency response capabilities).

All the above requirements would apply to these workers, including health declarations.

- Contractor employees travelling to site must undergo the same screening and health checks as employees.
- Companies proactively seek undertakings from suppliers and contractors on their health and hygiene practices and controls.
- Related providers, such as transport companies, operate crews from company and private accommodation. These companies have begun implementing their own programs for health and hygiene education, social distancing and health checks, and changing crew operations and rostering. Mining companies would seek to share site-specific safety updates with these regular contractors.
- Suppliers and contractors – particular rail companies – work across borders. Transshipping operators do not have physical contact at transfer points. Freight movement must remain an essential service for mining to continue to operate.
- Mining companies will work with suppliers to promote protocols relating to Indigenous communities
- Industry associations should serve as a point of contact to help coordinate company and supplier efforts.

## **Indigenous communities**

The resources sector is privileged to partner and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic companies are working closely with host Traditional Owners and other local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Indigenous organisations, local disaster management committees, health services providers and others to support community-led preparedness and awareness in remote areas.

Resources companies have introduced stringent measures to protect remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other vulnerable people from COVID-19.

At the same time, resources companies often provide the essential services that communities need including health services, electricity and emergency response capability. This means additional care is required.

Building on existing engagement and partnership arrangements, additional initiatives introduced which will continue include:

- Ceasing non-essential face-to-face activities with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote communities until further notice while maintaining strong engagement, including support for community-led health planning and local economic activity

- Taking special care in areas where a workforce is resident near Indigenous communities, including restricting workforce access to certain areas where appropriate. Arrangements are being developed in consultation with governments and remote Indigenous communities
- Continuously communicate health, hygiene and other arrangements to prevent community transmission, support local responses and maintain socio-economic resilience to key stakeholders using appropriate channels
- Use existing or establish new mechanisms to ensure community members and other stakeholders can provide feedback and seek additional information about arrangements. Responding to community feedback is a focus
- Continued essential services provision including health services, electricity and emergency response capability.

Strict hygiene protocols are in place for employees undertaking essential services in communities. This includes:

- Training of all staff on hygiene and health protocols for engaging with all visitors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote communities
- Utilisation of personnel protective equipment and other measures
- Health education to ensure that employees who are unwell do not attend work.
- Supporting local Indigenous health services providers and governments to undertake awareness activities and implement health, hygiene and preparedness activities:
- Provide support for development and delivery of culturally-appropriate health promotion activities
- Act on opportunities to support preparedness, including providing logistical and transportation assistance and specialist advice where practical
- Local community relations personnel will lead any essential engagement with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including Traditional Owners moving between remote communities:

- Progressing arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees returning from sites to remote communities. This may include arrangements for residents to be tested for COVID-19 as a precautionary measure and providing health, hygiene and other essentials as appropriate
- Working with governments, Indigenous organisations, supplier partners and other organisations to meet local social needs arising from increased populations in remote Indigenous communities.

Industry organisations can provide advice, support and assist coordination.

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