# Government Property Group

# COVID-19 Government Property Workplace Guidelines

**The overriding consideration for managing workplaces is a focus on the health, safety and well-being of workers and people accessing the workplace.**

This guidance and property principles and key settings is provided to assist agencies with workplace matters, focussing primarily on government offices, as a result of a COVID-19 Public Health response.

Guidance on health and safety, managing critical digital services and workforce considerations is available from the Government Health and Safety Lead, Digital Public Service and the Public Service Commission.

## Physical distancing in the workplace

The physical workplace needs to provide sufficient space for workers to maintain the appropriate level of physical distancing, depending on the circumstances under each respective alert level.

- **Alert level 1** has no requirement for physical distancing, rather it is encouraged to consider areas, or situations where this may be needed.
- Under **Alert Level 2 and 3**, the general physical distancing requirement is one metre at work.
- **Alert level 4** requires two metres physical distancing to be adhered to, noting that under Alert Level 4, alternative ways of working are required, such as working from home, remote working, rostering and split shifts, unless workers are required to attend the workplace due to being essential or emergency response workers.

Agencies should conduct their own risk assessments and engage with unions and workers to determine the most appropriate physical distancing measures across different work sites and operations. Always refer to covid19.govt.nz for more information on Alert Levels and to worksafe.govt.nz for workplace health and safety guidance.

Please also refer to property principles and key settings for general settings at different alert levels.

## Record keeping to support contact tracing

Contact tracing is an important part of helping to stop the spread of COVID-19. Recording people's movements helps to do this quickly and efficiently.

Displaying a NZ COVID Tracer app QR code is a legal requirement for each location. This applies to all Alert Levels.

- All people entering the workplace should be encouraged sign in using the QR Code.

- Under Alert Level 2 and higher you legally must record all people on your premises, and have an alternative system for people who do not use the NZ COVID Tracer app.
- Ensure that Agency standard security protocols are followed with visitors registering on arrival.
- Workers should be reminded they must use their own individual swipe cards to gain access into lifts and through doors, and as such, not to tail gate.
- It is important that any record keeping controls in place to enable contact tracing, protects the privacy and safety of individuals.

Refer to COVID19.govt.nz – contact tracing at your workplace for more information and detail on what is expected and alternative systems you can use.

**Placement of QR codes and use of swipe access**

- QR code posters should be displayed in a prominent place at or near main entrances.
- Placing these in a number of locations inside main entrances helps to not create an obstacle and enables physical distancing to be met by reducing people congregating.
- Consider whether there is a need to place a QR poster specific to each level of the building to allow workers and visitors to track their movements through the premises.
- Workers should be reminded that they are required to individually swipe into lifts and through doors and as such, not to tail gate. This will support quick and effective contact tracing, but is also a standard security requirement.
- Consider how you manage tracking of visitors throughout the building and workplace, especially where they are unable to individually swipe into lifts and doors. This will be important should contract tracing be required.

Refer to COVID19.govt.nz - how to get your QR code poster

## Health advice and not being in the workplace when unwell

Ministry of Health is the best source for health advice on COVID-19.

- Clear signage around the workplace and reception area is a simple reminder to workers and visitors of what is expected of them, including not entering the premises if unwell.
- Visitor sign-in systems can also be amended to include similar messaging of expectations, in the same way we have messaging related to Emergency Evacuation.

Refer to COVID19.govt.nz - for posters and signage available for download.

## Physical changes to the workplace

To ensure that physical distancing and health and safety is able to be managed, changes may be required to the physical workplace depending on alert level restrictions.

**Consider how each work space is used and what changes are required**

Think about each different area, the way each space is used and what controls are likely to be the most effective and appropriate to maintain physical distancing.

- Physical barriers or screens may be needed where physical distancing cannot be achieved. In other areas floor markers, signage or similar measures may be appropriate.
- Regular communications should be used to reinforce why physical distancing is important.

- Consider assigning workers to desks under higher alert levels (for example, Alert Level 3 & 4) to ensure physical distancing can be maintained.
- Workers must be able to maintain the general physical distancing requirement in the workplace.
- Different types of areas include:
  - **Congregation spaces -** kitchens, meeting rooms and utility areas
  - **Confined or circulation spaces -** lifts, hallways, entrance ways, bathrooms
  - **Public areas -** building entrance, lobbies and reception areas
  - **Workstations -** differ according to the type of work being undertaken.

Refer to COVID19.govt.nz - posters and signage available for download

**Managing numbers in lifts, stairwells etc.**

When physical distancing requirements are in place, for example under Alert levels 2, 3 and 4, additional controls may be needed in lifts and stairwells.

- The number occupying a lift should reduce significantly to enable physical distancing to be met.
- Directional movement may be required in stairwells (specifying upwards and downwards only) and throughout the floor, in tight spaces, to control flow in one direction where it is harder to maintain appropriate distancing.
- Where practical, consider utilising lower floors of the building or areas of the workplace to reduce movement throughout the building. This may only apply when access to the premises is limited to essential and emergency response workers and will enable physical distancing in stairwells to be maintained and concentrate cleaning protocols to those areas available for use.
- Where lifts have a lift calling panel, it is recommended that these are programmed to control the numbers allowed within the lift to enable physical distancing.

**Review and implement any physical changes to the workplace**

- Develop a checklist of all physical changes across each workplace and the different types of areas within those sites.
  - This may include any physical barriers or screens, movement or removal of furniture (e.g. reduce the number of chairs in meeting rooms or meal areas, spread out desks if additional space is required), along with the installation of floor markers, tape etc.  Include reference to these in communications with workers.
- Clear communications and signage is needed to ensure workers are aware of procedures.
- Consider deploying personalised equipment such as wireless keyboard and mouse to minimise sharing of hard to clean equipment.
- Ensure workplaces are well equipped with appropriate hand hygiene facilities and cleaning materials for self-sanitisation of high-touch work surfaces, equipment and facilities.
- Visible signs in common/shared spaces explaining processes and requirements for use e.g. clear signage of one-directional use of stairwell, capacity limit on lifts and meeting rooms etc. are an important reminder to workers and visitors of controls in place and what is expected of them.

## Evacuation procedures

The main priority in an emergency is the evacuation of the premises. However, there are some factors to be considered.

- Review evacuation procedures to determine how best to meet physical distancing requirements during emergency evacuation of buildings, and subsequent re-entry.

- Ensure that procedures include the requirement to record all workers and visitors re-entering the building. This is important where Alert Levels require record keeping for contact tracing purposes.
- Ensure that adequate provision of floor wardens and first aiders are available. New floor wardens may need to be assigned, i.e. under Alert Levels 3 and 4, when only essential and emergency response workers are accessing the premises.

## Contractors and suppliers to your premises

- Identify all contractors, suppliers and others who may be required to access your premises, and ensure you communicate to these parties so they know what will be required of them.
- Review contractor and supplier arrangements, including leases and sub-leases, to determine whether these require clarification or amendment.
    - Consider what additional supplies or equipment may be required, e.g. cleaning and sanitising (products and services), PPE (where appropriate), waste disposal services, mail, couriers and deliveries.
- Engage directly with your facilities management service provider to ensure that any new facilities management service levels (i.e. cleaning services) are clarified, understood and documented.

## Confirmed or probable COVID-19 case/s in the workplace

In the event that a worker or visitor becomes a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case, and has been at your workplace while potentially infectious, refer Ministry of Health [guidance for workplaces that have a case of COVID-19](#) for more information.

Where you may choose to apply alert levels to specific buildings in this scenario, ensure that any restrictions align with COVID-19 guidance to ensure there is no confusion for workers by providing consistency and comfort.

Remember, at any time, an employee who feels unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 should be encouraged to go home and to seek help by calling their GP (doctor) or call Healthline, for free, on 0800 358 5453.

**If the individual is seriously unwell or their life is at risk, dial 111.**

## Face coverings in the workplace

Face coverings are one part of keeping safe and protecting others, along with good hygiene practice and physical distancing.

Some workers may choose to wear these in the workplace, and they should not be made to feel uncomfortable with their personal choice.

For the most up to date information on the use of face coverings, please refer to COVID-19 website for [Alert Level requirements](#) and Ministry of Health for guidance on the [use of face coverings](#).

## New practices and procedures reviewed and monitored

- For all new or temporary measures implemented, a process to review, agree and adapt to further changes should be in place.

- It is recommended that you have any measures documented for different Alert Levels, to ensure that requirements are able to be implemented quickly.
- Amend procedures and provide clear guidance to all workers on any changes to processes or procedures, in particular, where workers are required to work across various regions where different Alert Levels may apply or work sites with different health and safety measures.

## Work conducted outside of government workplaces

- Review and update risk assessments for all work conducted off agency premises, including community work, field work, working from other locations (vehicles, private businesses, boats etc.).
- Specific COVID-19 considerations should be incorporated into on-site risk assessments, such as when workers conduct a risk assessment prior to entering a client's home address.
- Develop alternative ways of working if physical distancing cannot be maintained, except for essential services where relevant guidance including Ministry of Health guidance on PPE should be followed.
- Amend procedures and provide clear guidance to all workers on any changes, in particular where workers are required to work across various regions where different Alert Levels may apply.  This may include things like requiring workers to phone ahead and check procedures before conducting site visits.

## Cleaning and Ventilation

Cleaning of surfaces is only one part of keeping safe and protecting others, along with good hygiene practice and physical distancing.  During different Alert Levels and scenarios additional cleaning practices may be required.

Workers cleaning workstations and workspaces (i.e. meeting room or collaboration tables) before and after use, will act as an additional measure for health and safety in the workplace.

**Frequency and scope of workplace cleaning**

- Consider and implement regular deep cleaning of the premises (especially with increased restrictions, i.e. Alert Levels, 2, 3 and 4) and when more workers are returning to the workplace when moving between Alert Levels.
- Undertake more frequent cleaning of:
  - common areas, such as kitchens, bathrooms and meeting rooms
  - high contact areas, such as door handles, tables, handrails and photocopier touchpads
- Ensure that:
  - cleaning contractors are regularly cleaning the common areas and high contact areas, and that they are cleaning surfaces with a suitable cleaner and/or disinfectant and following the manufacturer's instructions for use.
  - rubbish bins (kitchen, café, bathroom etc.) are lined to make it easy to empty bins and reduce the cleaner's exposure to rubbish.
- Establishing and enforcing a clear desk policy can facilitate more regular cleaning by workers and cleaning contractors.

**Make cleaning products readily available to workers**

- Ensure there is sufficient soap and paper towels (unless hand dryers are installed) in bathrooms.
- Consider providing paper towels as well as hand dryers for those who would prefer not to use hand dryers.  This will also ensure people are able to turn off taps and open doors with a hand towel.
- Install sanitisers at all entry points to the building and/or floors; lifts, lobbies and kitchen areas.
- Make alcohol based cleaning wipes or suitable cleaning products and disposable clothes available in multiple locations around the general office area (for example utility bays, near personal lockers or tambours).
- Reinforce the expectation of workers cleaning workstations and workspaces (i.e. meeting room or collaboration tables) before and after use.

Refer to health.govt.nz - COVID-19 general cleaning and disinfection for more information.

**Ensure good ventilation**

- Agencies should request their landlords ensure air conditioning systems are well maintained.
- Air conditioning systems should not re-circulate air and should be vented to the outside as much as possible.
- If the workplace does not have an air conditioning system, open windows regularly to circulate fresh air.
- Other considerations
  - At nights and weekends, do not switch off ventilation, but keep systems running at low speed
  - Avoid opening windows in toilets to ensure the right direction of ventilation
  - Switch air handling units with recirculation to 100% outdoor air
  - Replace central outdoor air and extract air filters as usual, according to maintenance schedule
  - Perform regular filter replacement and maintenance works with common protective measures including respiratory protection.

## Managing different scenarios and transitioning between Alert Levels

Enabling a smooth transition and establishment of measures within a workplace is important.

- Develop processes and procedures to be followed in the event that a worker or visitor becomes a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case, and has been at your workplace while potentially infectious.
  - Where you may choose to apply alert levels to specific buildings in this scenario, ensure that any restrictions align with COVID-19 guidance to ensure there is no confusion for workers by providing consistency and comfort.
  - Refer to health.govt.nz - workplaces that have a case of COVID-19 for more information.
- Consider how you will transition between Alert Levels (either up or down) and the impact this change will have on people, changes that will be needed to the workplace, and any policy or procedural changes that may be required.
- Consistent application of measures when moving back into Alert Levels is needed, for example;
  - Measures applied during previous Alert Level 2, should be the same if moving to Alert Level 2 again to ensure workers, visitors and contractors know what to expect, but also provides a seamless transition for facilities teams. Note there may be instances where changes are needed, due to improvements being identified.

- Variations of Alert Levels could apply in the future, as experienced with Alert Level 2.5. Workplaces should be clear on the requirements for each Alert Level at the time and adapt as necessary.
- Record restrictions or changes needed for each Alert Level to enable consistency on the application of restrictions in the workplace.
- It is unlikely that controls will be the same across all your premises. Consider what these differences might be; this may be as a result of regional Alert Levels, the type of workplace or the activities or functions undertaken.

## Multi-tenant and co-location premises

As Government agencies do not always occupy an entire premises, it is important to engage with other tenants; this may be other Government agencies, private sector, retail or co-location partners.

- Ensure that you are engaging and co-ordinating with other tenants to determine appropriate controls that work for all within the building. Consider cleaning of common and shared areas (lifts, building entrances), limiting numbers in the lifts, or in some cases engaging with the landlord.
- Establish regular communication channels between all, this may result in establishing a building working group. It is recommended to consider if this will benefit post recovery as part of business as usual activities and include in Business Continuity Plans (BCP's).
- Large agencies with more mature property functions should consider their capacity to assist smaller agencies; this may include supporting conversations with landlords.
- Understand who will have access to the building in higher Alert Levels, i.e. some tenants may be essential services or part of Government, and you may be able to help with shared resources. For example, freeing up space for a call centre or increased resources being stood-up at short notice.
- Ensure all tenants display QR codes, this includes all QR codes being available on the main entrances before workers and visitors access lifts or stairs.
- In co-locations, the lead agency will take the lead to determine appropriate controls in collaboration with co-location parties.

## Looking longer-term

For many organisations, BCP's focus on natural disasters and ICT outages. It can also take a few iterations of implementation to refine and ensure most scenarios are covered.

- Review and update BCP's to align with experiences from the COVID-19 Public Health response. Many agencies have quickly implemented mobile ICT capability and have a better understanding of roles that can work remotely.
- Ensure continuity planning includes engaging with other agencies; either within their sector, other tenants, and dependencies with other agencies or those with similar functions that could be leaned on or who you can support or provide assistance to.
- Consider what opportunities can be explored to support and enable a flexible workplace.
- Establishing a building working group which can be stood up at short notice when needed.
- Update existing health and safety risks, policies and procedures (including incident response, incident reporting and emergency management) to reflect changes.

## Duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA)

Under the HSWA, Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) have a range of health and safety obligations in respect of their workers. In particular, a PCBU's primary duty is to ensure as far

as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of its workers while at work for the PCBU, and any workers whose activities in carrying out work are influenced or directed by the PCBU while carrying out work.  The term "worker" includes employees, contractors, subcontractors, apprentices and volunteers.

As such, Chief Executives, Directors and other "officers" under the HSWA of agencies as PCBU's need to consider and apply these guidelines in light of their primary duty of care towards their workers.

Refer to worksafe.govt.nz - managing health and safety for more information.