

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

PRINCIPLES AND PROTOCOLS FOR REDUCING THE POTENTIAL RISK OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AT UNIVERSITIES

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Further inquiries should be made to the Chief Executive:

GPO Box 1142 Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: +61 (0)2 6285 8100
Fax: +61 (0)2 6285 8101
Email: contact@universitiesaustralia.edu.au

UNIVERSITIESAUSTRALIA.EDU.AU

ABN 53 008 502 930

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1 PURPOSE

This practical guidance has been prepared for universities and their leaders to reduce to an acceptable level the risk of Coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in university environments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document is broad, and decisions about how to apply its guidance must be made by each jurisdiction with consideration of their local epidemiology and context.

This document provides high level guidance to universities; however, it must be read in conjunction with guidelines for university and TAFE campuses that will be published on the website of [SafeWork Australia](#), and guidance from your [State/Territory WHS regulators](#).

This document is current as of 10 June 2020 and is subject to change in line with changes to the Australian Government and State/Territory governments' general health guidelines.

2 BACKGROUND

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus. Symptoms include fever, coughing, sore throat, and shortness of breath.

The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene and physical distancing can reduce the risk of infection. For most people, COVID-19 is experienced as a mild disease. The focus on reducing transmission is to ease the burden on our health system, rather than eliminate the spread.

If you, your staff, your students, or your community and business visitors are sick and think you have symptoms of COVID-19, seek medical advice. If you want to talk to someone about your symptoms, or are seeking information, call the [National Coronavirus Hotline](#) for advice on 1800 020 080. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

3 PRINCIPLES FOR UNIVERSITIES

Universities are considered essential and university activities must continue with appropriate risk mitigation measures in place. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) supports the re-activation of the on-campus environment with the following principles:

- help stop the spread and stay healthy;
- stay informed and continue to support physical distancing in accordance with the Australian Government and State/Territory guidelines; and
- apply specific sector-based guidelines to all entities on campus where relevant (e.g. child care centres, schools, sporting facilities, cafes etc.).

Universities are complex entities and many operate like small cities with multiple activities and lines of work and many stakeholders.

Universities must continue to support all measures to stop the spread and to stay healthy. Universities will encourage their university communities to download and utilise the [COVIDSafe app](#) to assist in contact tracing, recognising that it is an individual's choice.

4 GENERAL MEASURES

The following general measures will apply to support physical distancing and help to protect health service provision as well as ensuring business continuity:

- Staff and students who are sick with cold and flu symptoms must NOT attend university.
- Students living on campus should ensure minimum contact with others during the period of illness with cold and flu symptoms.
- Staff and students who are in vulnerable populations should continue to work or study from home or seek medical advice from their health practitioner to support informed risk assessment and decision-making regarding the suitability of returning to the university environment.
- Staff who can attend work safely should do so, in line with each university's recovery plan.
- Business meetings which can be held with physical distancing measures in place can occur but long or large meetings must continue to be held by audio-visual link or other remote means.
- Non-essential events must continue to be deferred or cancelled.
- Online access to content should continue for those unable to attend or for large lectures and gatherings and in line with each university's teaching delivery plan.
- Lecture and examination spaces must have no more than one person per four square metres of floor space and have fewer than the number of people allowed by the Australian and State/Territory governments.
- Clinical placements should continue to be supported if the necessary risk assessments have been undertaken, after discussion with clinical supervisors and facilities. The safety of patients, staff and students is paramount.
- Staff should continue to undertake their normal duties with risk mitigation strategies.
- All staff, students and visitors must adhere to the physical distancing guidelines.

Universities must continue to operate within their risk management and work health and safety (WHS) frameworks and ensure obligations to provide safe workplaces and work practices are maintained. This includes where staff may be working in relatively isolated circumstances as the transition into on campus environments proceeds.

Where first aid is required, standard precautions must be adopted at all times.

5 ACTIVITY SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

This section covers:

- teaching;
- research;
- students and staff on campus;
- student accommodation; and
- other services and activities.

5.1 TEACHING

A. LARGE, MEDIUM AND SMALL GROUP STUDY

- Lecture and examination spaces must have no more than one person per four square metres of floor space and have fewer than the number of people allowed by the Australian and State/Territory governments.
- Online access to content should continue for large lectures and gatherings and in line with each university's teaching delivery plan.
- Where physical distancing and appropriate cleaning can be maintained, face-to-face teaching can resume, such as labs and practicals. Again, the number of people allowed must be in line with the Australian and State/Territory government guidelines. Clear signage must be provided at entry of venues indicating maximum occupancy according to the one person per four square metres of floor space guideline.
- Hand sanitiser should be provided for use by staff and students at venue entries.

B. USE OF LABORATORIES AND SPECIALIST LEARNING SPACES

- Physical distancing controls must be established and adhered to within laboratory and specialist learning spaces, including managing access to equipment and workspaces.
- For each lab and learning teaching space a physical distancing plan must be developed which allows teaching to continue within guidelines.
- Each lab and specialist learning space should review cleaning chemicals, and protocols and regularly disinfect high touch surfaces, such as benches, door handles, etc. The opportunity for increased ventilation by adjusting air-conditioning, where appropriate should also be considered.
- Each lab and specialist teaching space must ensure relevant Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is used, where appropriate, to avoid contamination and for personal protection.

C. FIELD-BASED STUDIES AND PLACEMENTS

- Field based activities can proceed in line with appropriate university and host organisation risk assessment and guidance on physical distancing.

- Clinical placements should continue to be supported if the necessary risk assessments have been undertaken, after discussion with clinical supervisors and facilities. The safety of patients, staff and students is paramount.
- Other placements can be phased-in where appropriate, in line with relevant university and host organisation's risk assessment and guidance on physical distancing
- Outdoor learning, for example for surveying or media students, must include appropriate cleaning of equipment before and after use; use of appropriate PPE and compliance with physical distancing measures.

D. CLINICAL/ HUMAN PARTICIPANT

- Participants in a vulnerable risk group or who are unwell must be advised not to participate until further notice.
- Clients and staff must maintain physical distancing requirements where possible.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, risk-based strategies must be implemented.
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols must be developed for communal equipment and areas.
- Minimise the number of participants and consider how interactions may be completed without physical contact (e.g. via videoconference).

5.2 RESEARCH

5.2.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Research staff who can attend work safely should do so, in line with each university's recovery plan.
- Appropriate supervision must be in place for all researchers on-site to ensure that both physical distancing and appropriate health and safety measures are undertaken.
- Research students should be adequately supervised on site by a staff member with appropriate expertise.
- Technical support staff and core facilities staff should be onsite as required to continue to support research.
- Inductions will continue, including additional information on physical distancing and other requirements, either in person or in virtual mode if necessary.
- Research team leaders should determine what research work can be undertaken on-site, and who needs to be there to do it. They will take into consideration requirements of the research, expertise of researchers, and appropriate supervision.
- Consideration of a roster of researchers can be developed, where necessary, to ensure that research can be completed with optimal compliance to physical distancing requirements.
- Essential meetings to be held outside in the open air, in large venues that allow physical distancing or via video conferencing or phone.

- Shared research areas must establish suitable cleaning processes to be completed prior to commencing and prior to finishing in the area, provide hand hygiene products and suitable waste disposal bins and maintain regular cleaning and waste disposal programs.

5.2.2 SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

If the following guidelines cannot be managed in line with physical distancing requirements, a risk management plan is required.

A. LAB BASED

- Physical distancing controls must be established and adhered to within laboratory spaces, including managing access to equipment and workspaces.
- Each lab must develop a physical distancing plan which allows research to continue within guidelines and which may consider staggered access times to facilitate research.
- Each lab must review cleaning protocols and regularly disinfect high touch surfaces, such as benches, door handles, etc. The opportunity for increased ventilation by adjusting air conditioning, where appropriate should also be considered.
- Each lab must ensure relevant PPE is used, where appropriate, to avoid contamination and for personal protection.
- Essential visitors (including contractors) are allowed where physical distancing can be established and managed.
- The process for managing external participants, volunteers and sample collection must be developed in line with physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

B. FIELDWORK

- Research team leaders should consider how researchers can access the site safely, including determining what form of transport is appropriate and parking availability.
- Activities must comply with physical distancing, wherever possible.
- The number of participants must be minimised with consideration as to how interactions may be completed without physical contact or staggered over different periods of time.
- Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products must be made available in the field.
- Emergency response plans must be established in case of incident.

C. STUDIO BASED

- Physical distancing measures must be established and adhered to within studio spaces.
- Consideration may be given to staggered access times to facilitate activity.
- The numbers of participants in activities must be minimised to support physical distancing and consideration given to alternative arrangements to physical contact such as use of technology to enable reduced physical contact (e.g. video conferencing, remote camera, etc).

D. OFFICE BASED

- Office based research can resume, ensuring physical distancing is in place in shared office environments.
- Shared workspaces (e.g. hot desk) must have an agreed disinfecting protocol prior to use.
- Strict hygiene and physical distancing must be applied, particularly in lunch rooms or eating areas.
- Large and long meetings should use video conferencing to support physical distancing.

E. ANIMAL HOUSES

- The number of people in the animal house must be limited, including a roster to avoid cross contamination and to enable access only where essential.
- Restriction on visitors must be in place and consideration given to alternative methods for access (e.g. via remote camera).
- Use of appropriate PPE must be in place.

F. CLINICAL/HUMAN PARTICIPANT

- Participants in a vulnerable risk group or who are unwell should be advised not to participate until further notice.
- Clients and staff must maintain physical distancing requirements where possible.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, risk-based strategies must be implemented.
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols must be developed for communal equipment and areas.
- Minimise the number of participants and consider how interactions may be completed without physical contact (e.g. via video conferencing).

5.3 STUDENTS AND STAFF ON CAMPUS

5.3.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Hand hygiene facilities and products must be visible and their use promoted widely.
- Physical distancing guidelines, good hygiene practices must be promoted and staff and students reminded of avoiding physical greetings.
- A staggered return of staff and students on campus should be considered in line with each university's teaching plan.
- Regular communication and updates on health protocols should be provided to staff and students (e.g. via digital notice boards, email, signage, within classes, etc).
- Plans for physical distancing must be in place for common areas.
- Public gatherings must be restricted.

- Efforts to avoid queuing must be in place and where necessary establish a clear 1.5 metre distance between people.
- Suitable waste disposal bins and regular cleaning and waste disposal programs must be in place.
- Regular cleaning protocol must be in place to disinfect high touch surfaces, such as tables, kitchen benches and door handles.
- Staff and students should be encouraged to use online ordering services for retail outlets on campus where available (e.g. pre-order takeaway online and set up a pickup area).
- Ventilation in common areas should be increased by opening windows or adjusting air-conditioning.

5.3.2 SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. PUBLIC FACING AREAS

- Physical distance plans must be established for each public facing area.
- Appropriate hand hygiene products must be in place in each public/counter area.

B. LIBRARY

- Self-service access (e.g. checking out/in books) should be encouraged.
- Online support services, via digital platforms (e.g. video conferencing, email, etc) should continue where appropriate.
- Use of electronic, rather than hardcopy resources should continue to be promoted in line with each university's strategy.
- The layout of the library space, to enable physical distancing (e.g. limit number to access, limit chairs/tables, install screens, etc.) should be adjusted where possible.

C. SOLE OCCUPANCY OFFICE

- Staff and students who have access to single offices can work from these spaces in line with the university's delivery plans.

D. SHARED OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

- Shared office plans must be developed to ensure appropriate physical distancing is in place which may include staggered hours or rosters in line with each university's delivery plan.

E. SHARED TEA ROOMS/KITCHENS/COMMON AREAS

- Physical distancing must be promoted through signage and layout.

F. RETAIL EATING AREAS

- Level of service provision must be in line with Australian Government and State and Territory Chief Medical Officer (CMO) guidelines (e.g. takeaway only, separate ordering and pickup points, no cash).
- Retailers should be supported to implement plans for service that enable physical distancing. Service areas should be established to promote physical distancing (e.g. seating arrangements, barricades, marked standing points for service lines, etc.).

G. COMPUTER FACILITIES

- Appropriate hand hygiene and cleaning products must be available in all computer labs with signage to promote pre-use and post use cleaning.
- Physical distancing must be implemented via staggering the numbers of computers that are used at any one time (e.g. every second computer).

H. STAFF/STUDENT CLUBS

- Recreational staff and student clubs must follow Australian Government and State and Territory CMO guidelines.

5.4 STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

- Universities must work in close collaboration with local State and Territory health officials to make decisions related to on campus housing and abide by specific regulation and advice in their jurisdiction.
- Accommodation residents will be educated on the precautions they should take to help protect themselves against community spread of COVID-19. This will require residents to abide by university protocols and standards.
- Additional precautions must be established in all common areas with an assessment on the suitability and requirement of maintaining shared facilities and the additional cleaning requirements as a result.
- To support the staff and managers of residential halls and student accommodation, universities must develop plans and protocols that provide clear health and safety requirements and expectations for behaviours in communal areas. This may include the restriction of some activities. These plans and protocols must be maintained in line with States and Territory regulations as well as national COVID-19 guidelines.
- Where universities have external student housing providers, liaison is essential to ensure that there is consistency of approach, standards and protocols.
- Universities must support the dissemination of information about COVID-19 to counter the spread of misinformation and mitigate fear for those in residential halls and student accommodation.
- Where a resident tests positive for COVID-19, universities will support the implementation of the isolation protocols and support the student through the period of quarantine.

5.5 OTHER SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

5.5.1 COMMUNITY VISITS/EVENTS

A. LARGE EVENTS

No large events can be held at this point in time as per CMO guidelines.

B. SMALL EVENTS

Non-essential small events should be deferred or cancelled. Essential events should be held online.

C. WORKSHOPS/CONFERENCES

Workshops and conferences should continue to be held online until further notice.

D. CAMPUS TOURS/OPEN DAYS

Open days and campus tours should be held online until further notice.

E. GALLERIES

On campus galleries must operate in line with CMO guidelines for this sector.

F. GARDENS/SANCTUARIES

On campus gardens and outdoor sanctuaries can be utilised for exercise or outdoor activity in line with CMO guidelines.

G. GENERAL VISITORS

General visitors such as business guests can visit in line with physical distancing guidelines.

5.5.2 STUDENT GROUPS AND CULTURAL GROUPS (INCLUDING STUDENT UNIONS)

- Student groups and clubs play an important role in the life of universities and are encouraged to maintain links, whilst adhering to protocols, through this difficult time. The opportunity to support each other and maintain relationships and student wellbeing has never been more important.
- All university groups and clubs must adhere to Australian and State and Territory Government COVID-19 physical distancing regulations. Where opportunities exist for groups and clubs to continue, in a responsible manner, in line with COVID-19 protocols they are encouraged to do so. For example, through the holding of meetings and events via video conferencing, social media platforms or phone calls.

- Universities will work with student groups and clubs to ensure that activities will be reinstated in line with the relaxation of physical distancing measures when they occur at State and Territory levels.

5.5.3 ON CAMPUS CHILD CARE CENTRES ON CAMPUS SCHOOLS ON CAMPUS SPORTING CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS RETAIL AND FOOD OUTLETS ON CAMPUS MEDICAL SERVICES (E.G. GPs, PHARMACIES ETC.)

All facilities in the above categories must operate in accordance with their sector or industry guidelines issued by Australian and State and Territory CMOs.

5.5.4 COLLOCATED BUSINESSES

Advice on physical distancing and the university's approach will be provided, asking any collocated businesses to comply.

5.5.5 ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING

Coronaviruses, including COVID-19, can survive on surfaces for many hours but are readily inactivated by cleaning and disinfection.

To reduce the spread of viruses or germs in universities through environmental cleaning, arrangements must be in place to:

- clean and disinfect frequently used high touch surfaces such as benchtops, desks, doorknobs, taps and handrails with a detergent solution or detergent/disinfectant wipes;
- clean and disinfect frequently used objects such as shared computers, photocopiers and sports equipment with a detergent solution or detergent/disinfectant wipes;
- clean and disinfect outdoor equipment with a detergent solution or detergent/disinfectant wipes;
- increase the amount of fresh air available indoors by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning where it is appropriate to do so; and
- provide regular cleaning of toilets, showers and bathroom facilities.

Further information from the Department of Health about the nature and frequency of environmental cleaning and disinfection in the community can be found [here](#).

6 GUIDELINES IN THE EVENT OF A POSITIVE CASE

6.1 COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS

Universities will continue to communicate the latest health advice to all members of the university community and remind them of the importance of staying away when ill and getting tested if COVID-19 symptoms are present.

If a student or member of staff is unwell and think they might have contracted COVID-19, they must follow the Australian Government's Department of Health [advice](#) on what they must do next.

6.2 NOTIFICATION – HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

In the event of a positive case, a Public Health Unit (PHU) will assist with advice and guidance on appropriate follow-on actions. Universities must be prepared to provide support as necessary to the PHU, including;

- information on the setup of the facility/location the person may have visited;
- total number of staff and students in the facility and in the affected area and names as appropriate; and
- any other information that can support contact tracing.

The PHU will advise and assist with the following:

- confirming the presence of an outbreak; and
- identifying the control measures that need to be in place.

6.3 STATE/TERRITORY PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT CONTACT DETAILS:

Contact details and websites of the local State and Territory health departments are available [here](#).

6.4 COVID-19 CASE AND OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

6.4.1 RESPONSE TO A SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19 ON CAMPUS

Where there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a campus environment, staff must work through their WHS officer who will contact the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for further advice or their State/Territory based health department.

There may be a need to implement short-term room or building closure procedures if an infected person has been on campus to ensure adequate cleaning.

If a staff member or student is unwell, they must not attend campus or must leave to go home. If they are a suspected COVID-19 case, they must self-isolate and seek testing in accordance with state or territory guidelines.

The staff member or student must remain away whilst a diagnosis is sought. If COVID-19 is excluded, the staff member may be able to return to work once well and as guided by the

infectious period for their condition. If a diagnosis of COVID-19 is confirmed, the staff member must be excluded until they meet the criteria for release from isolation.

It is important that all areas also follow situationally appropriate environmental cleaning following a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a facility. In most cases, the identification of a suspected or confirmed case should not require closure beyond the immediate affected area.

Universities will be supported by public health units in the event of an outbreak in their immediate or nearby areas. This will include detailed information and specific advice on additional measures to take beyond this guidance.

6.4.2 CONTACT TRACING

Health services use contact tracing to find people who may have been exposed to an infectious disease. There are two types of 'contacts' – close contacts and casual contacts. Health services give advice to both contact types on what they need to do.

Close contacts are those that are likely to be at a higher risk of being infected.

'Close contact' is defined as any person with the following exposure to a suspect, confirmed or probable case during the case's infectious period, without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE):

- direct contact with the body fluids or the laboratory specimens of a case;
- face-to-face contact in any setting within two metres of a case for 15 minutes or more; or
- having been in a closed environment (e.g. a classroom or lab) within two metres of a case for 15 minutes or more.

Casual contacts are persons with exposure to the case who does not meet the criteria for a close contact.