

Working from home during COVID-19

Government
Health & Safety Lead

During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers may be required to work from home. In this situation, their home is considered a workplace, and agencies (PCBUs) therefore have a responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 to eliminate or minimise any health and safety risks, so far as reasonably practicable. Workers may not have the ideal equipment, systems, or set up straight away, so managers may need to support them to find short-term alternatives. Here are some of the things managers should consider when managing health and safety risks, and supporting their workers' wellbeing when working from home. For the purpose of this guide, workers will be referred to as *your team* or *team members*.

WORKSTATION Team members might not have the perfect equipment to set up their work stations straight away. Help them to identify a surface that they can comfortably sit at with forearms and feet both resting parallel to the floor. Devices can be propped up with items like books so the monitor is at eye level, and books or cushions can be useful as foot rests. Sit on a supportive chair with a back rest if possible. [More information.](#)

WORK ENVIRONMENT Help your team to identify things around the home that could cause them harm. Consider electrical equipment, overloaded outlets, and cables. Consider potential slip/trip hazards around the home or near the workstation, excessive noise, lighting, fire hazards, and other people in the work-space. The work environment should also be warm and dry.

PERSONAL PRIVACY AND SECURITY Your team members may be more at risk if people know they are working from home. Talk with them about not disclosing their location and keeping safe on social media. They should ensure they take reasonable steps to keep their homes secure. Talk with your team members and help to find alternative working arrangements if they have any domestic concerns or are unable to work from home. [More information.](#)

HOME/CARING RESPONSIBILITIES Your team members may need to support dependants while working from home. This may include children who can't go to school or family members who are unwell or self-isolating. This may put extra stress on them. Work together to make a plan for how to manage work around this. This may include altering hours worked, allowing for regular breaks, or altering workload.



MENTAL HEALTH The uncertainty and anxiety surrounding a pandemic may affect people in different ways. Your team members may feel more stressed and/or fatigued during this time. Regularly communicate with your team about how they are coping, and adjust workload, work responsibilities, and work times accordingly. Discuss support options available to them and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling, to practice self-care, and to reach out for support. [More information.](#)

SOCIAL ISOLATION Talk with your team about the importance of maintaining social interaction while working from home. Encourage them to have regular social interactions with each other throughout the work day via electronic communication. Encourage the use of video conferencing where possible for daily catch-ups.

WORK Your team members may need to adjust their workload, type of work, and hours worked. The classification of the information they work with may limit what work can realistically be completed from home. Some team members may have urgent work to complete and you should discuss how you can support this. Some of your team may also have responsibilities or commitments outside of work during the pandemic. You should talk with them and plan how to manage work around this.



CREATING A ROUTINE Encourage your team to structure their day like a normal work day. They should try to work their usual hours and take regular breaks, as well as allocate time for hydration/meal breaks, exercise, and talking with colleagues. Encourage them to "separate work from home" by working away from the bedroom and switching off devices at the end of the work day.

EMERGENCIES Ensure that you have a list of all team members' contact numbers, including their emergency contact. Help your team members to put in place a plan for managing emergencies in their house, considering what to do in a fire, medical emergency, earthquake, power outage etc. Discuss how incidents should be reported.

INFORMATION PRIVACY AND SECURITY You should talk to your team about the how to follow privacy and security requirements for the type/classification of information they are allowed to work with at home. They may need to adjust the work they do or take extra precautions to protect agency information, such as physically locking devices and information away if not in use.

KEEPING IN TOUCH Keep in regular communication with your team by scheduling in phone calls or video conference calls to discuss how they are going and how they are managing work under these circumstances. Social isolation is a risk that may need to be managed. Use this time to regularly discuss any health and safety concerns too.



OTHER PEOPLE AT HOME Talk to your team about other people who may be in the home. They may have to share a working space with flatmates or family members which could impact how they can work from home and what they can work on. Discuss this with each team member and put a plan in place on how to manage this situation.

What do I need to do as a manager?

1

THINK about the things that could harm a team member while working at home

This could be things like their work space set up, electrical wires from a laptop, or loss of social interaction with the team. Also consider COVID-19 risks and the specific protocols for distancing and social isolation. Everyone will be different, so take time to think about each member of your team.

2

TALK to your team members about these things and get their view

Your team members can help you to identify the things that may cause harm and assess the level of risk around this. For example, some of your team may have care responsibilities at home to manage while working and may need to discuss a flexible work arrangement, or some may require more support with setting up their work station.

3

WORK TOGETHER to manage these

It may not be possible to put in place the ideal set up straight away, so work together to identify the best way to manage these in this situation. For example, set up the dining table with a secure makeshift stand to raise height, tape down electrical wires, schedule in daily team video-calls.

4

CHECK IN to see how these are working

Once you've worked together to identify the things that could harm them while working from home and put in place things to manage these, check in regularly to see how these are going. You may want to schedule in a regular catch up to discuss any issues with things like their desk set-up or how they're feeling being away from the team. Ensure team members know how to report any incidents or concerns.

5

TAKE ACTION if there is an issue or a team members raises concerns

If your team member is having problems or raises a concern, work with them to identify a way to address this. For example, if they are getting back pain from working at their dining table, can they alternate between sitting and standing at the kitchen bench? Or could they take regular exercise/stretch breaks every 30 minutes?



