

How to maintain a COVID-Safe Workplace

Top questions and answers

July 2021







Ai Group offers a range of multidisciplinary Work Health Safety Consulting Services.



Contact us to discuss how we can help to make your business a safe workplace.

Contact the Workplace Advice Line on 1300 55 66 77
or workplaceadvice@aigroup.com.au for further advice.

Stay up-to-date with the latest advice and resources on our dedicated COVID-19 web-page at the [COVID-19 advice and resources for members page](#)







Help stop the spread of COVID-19:

- Check in everywhere, every time - all businesses and workplaces that remain open are required to use the [Victorian Government QR Code Service](#), unless an exemption applies.
- Stay up to date with the [latest exposure sites](#)
- Get tested if you are ill - anyone with COVID-19 [symptoms](#) should [get tested](#) immediately.
- Support workers to get vaccinated - appointments can be booked [here](#).
- Update your COVIDSafe Plan - every business with on-site operations must have a [COVIDSafe Plan](#). It's your list of safety actions.

For more information go to coronavirus.vic.gov.au




How do the public health directions in my state or territory interact with my WHS duty?

- You must comply with your state or territory's public health directions that apply to your business.
 - Your WHS duty is to do all that you reasonably can to manage the risks of a person contracting and/or spreading COVID-19 in your workplace.
 - Depending on the circumstances, you may need to implement control measures in order to meet your WHS duty that go beyond the minimum requirements stated in public health directions or advised by public health authorities.
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Duty to workers

- You must do what you can to ensure the health and safety of your workers.
 - You must eliminate the risk of exposure to COVID-19 if reasonably practicable.
 - If you are not able to eliminate the risk of exposure to COVID-19, you must minimise that risk, as far as is reasonably practicable.
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What can I do to
protect my
workers?

- considering working from home arrangements
 - requiring workers to practice physical distancing
 - requiring workers to practice good hygiene
 - requiring workers to stay home when sick, and
 - cleaning the workplace regularly and thoroughly.
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Do I still have to consult with workers if I am following advice from health authorities?

- You must consult with workers about all the things you are doing to identify and manage the risks to keep workers safe during the pandemic.
 - Involving workers will help build commitment to this process and any changes you make at the workplace.
 - Consultation does not require consensus or agreement but you must allow your workers to be part of the decision making process. You must genuinely take into account their views.
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Duty to other people in the workplace

- You must take actions to ensure that the work of your business or undertaking is not putting the health and safety of other persons (such as customers, clients and visitors) at risk of contracting COVID-19.
 - Protect others from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by, for example:
 - Requiring them to practice physical distancing, including through contactless deliveries and payments
 - Requiring them to practice good hygiene, and
 - Requiring others to stay away from the workplace, unless essential
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What should workers do?

- work safely and observe any new requirements for physical distancing
 - follow instructions (e.g. about how to wash hands thoroughly)
 - ask if you're not sure how to safely perform the work
 - use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks in the way you were trained and instructed to use it, and
 - report any unsafe or unhealthy situations to your supervisor or to your health and safety representative (HSR).
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Can a worker
work from home
while they are in
isolation?

- If your worker is fit for work and this is consistent with advice from their treating clinician.
 - Asymptomatic workers can work from home during the isolation period, with appropriate measures in place for household members, subject to the direction or advice of their treating clinician.
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When can
workers return
to work
following
recovery from
COVID-19?

- Workers who have been isolated after having tested positive for COVID-19 can return to work when they have fully recovered and have met the criteria for clearance from isolation.
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Can I conduct temperature checks on workers or others?

- You may want to monitor the health of your workers through administering temperature checks, as a preventative measure in managing a COVID-19 outbreak in your workplace.
 - There may be times where this is required or reasonable. For example,
 - in workplaces where vulnerable people are present, such as hospitals and aged care facilities, or
 - if directed or recommended by a state or territory (e.g. under public health orders).
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How can I manage stress from COVID-19

- Regularly ask your workers how they are going and if anything is stressing them.
 - Acknowledge their feelings about the situation
 - Stay informed with information from official sources and regularly communicate or share this information with workers
 - Consult your workers and representatives on any risks to their psychological health and physical health and safety
 - Support innovations to address the psychosocial risks where you reasonably can
 - Provide workers with a point of contact to discuss their concerns
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How can I manage stress from COVID-19

- Make workplace information available in a central place
 - Inform workers about their entitlements if they become unfit for work or have caring responsibilities
 - Inform workers about their rights under WHS laws, including the right to stop work in certain circumstances and the right not to be discriminated against or disadvantaged for raising work health and safety concerns in the workplace
 - Proactively support workers who you identify to be more at risk of workplace psychological injury (e.g. frontline workers or those working from home), and
 - Refer workers to appropriate work related mental health and wellbeing support services, such as employee assistance programs or the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service.
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My staff are working from home. How do I look after their mental health?

- Where workers are working from home you should consider the tasks you have asked workers to perform from home and whether doing these in relative isolation could cause stress, and what you can do to minimise that stress.
 - Before you implement any control measures for working from home, you must consult your staff about how they are going, anything that is stressing them and what you can do to minimise that stress.
 - Regular and meaningful communication with your workers. Make sure you frequently check in on how they are going and if anything has changed.
 - Make sure they know who to talk to if they need additional support or are feeling concerned.
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How do I look after Vulnerable workers?

- The following groups have been identified as having a higher risk of serious illness if infected with the virus
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
 - People 65 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
 - People 70 years and older, and
 - People with compromised immune systems
 - The Australian Government Department of Health advises that these workers should be supported to work from home where possible. If they cannot, a risk assessment should be undertaken to address the risks of exposure to COVID-19.
 - This may require re-assigning vulnerable employees to other roles where contact with others is minimised.
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Do I need to provide PPE?

- You must provide workers with appropriate PPE, and information and training on how and why they are required to use it.
 - PPE alone will not protect workers.
 - You must implement a range of control measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, including good hygiene measures, physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting and providing workers with information and training.
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Do I need a
COVIDSafe plan?

- Every Victorian business with on-site operations must have a COVIDSafe Plan.
 - Random spot checks are taking place across the state to ensure compliance. Failure to comply can result in an on-the-spot fine of up to \$9,913 or up to \$20,000 for serious offences.
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What is a COVIDSafe Plan?

- A COVIDSafe Plan supports a business to protect its staff, customers, visitors, and the community.
 - It also prepares a business for a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace.
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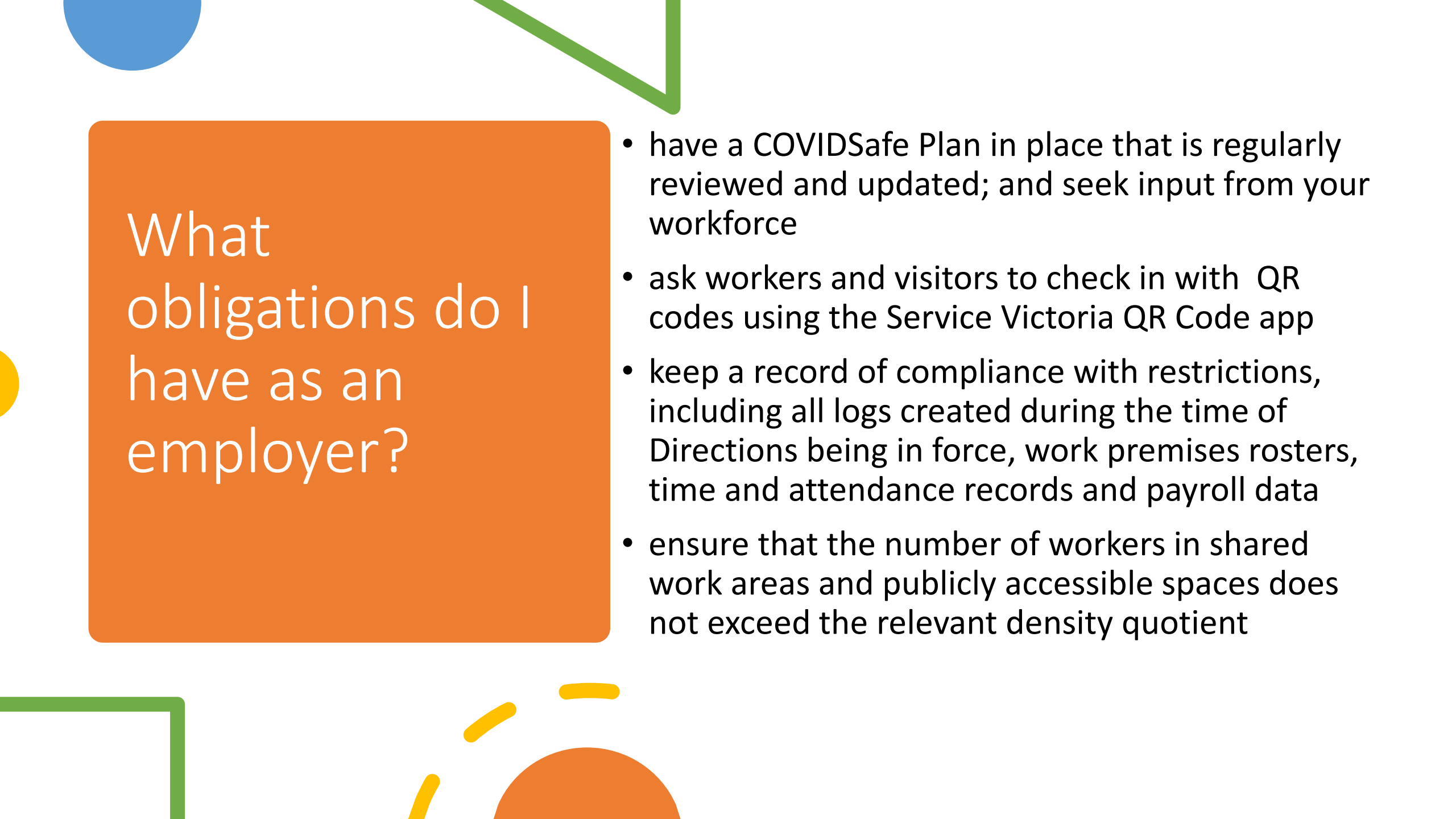
Six principles of COVIDSafe workplaces

- Victorian business and industry must follow the six principles to ensure a COVIDSafe workplace.
 - It is also mandatory for every Victorian business to have a COVIDSafe Plan.
 - practice physical distancing, where possible
 - wear a face mask
 - practise good hygiene
 - keep electronic records and act quickly
 - avoid interactions in enclosed spaces
 - create workforce bubbles.
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My organisation already has a COVIDSafe Plan in place. Do I need to create a new one using the Victorian Government template?

- You don't need to rewrite your COVIDSafe Plan in the revised template.
 - You should review your current COVIDSafe Plan regularly to ensure it aligns with the latest advice, guidelines and to ensure it meets the requirements under the six COVIDSafe Principles.
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What obligations do I have as an employer?

- have a COVIDSafe Plan in place that is regularly reviewed and updated; and seek input from your workforce
- ask workers and visitors to check in with QR codes using the Service Victoria QR Code app
- keep a record of compliance with restrictions, including all logs created during the time of Directions being in force, work premises rosters, time and attendance records and payroll data
- ensure that the number of workers in shared work areas and publicly accessible spaces does not exceed the relevant density quotient





How can I manage a confirmed or suspected case from COVID-19

- if a worker is unwell, send them home and direct them to get tested. They must stay home until they have been cleared by the Department of Health.
 - report positive cases of COVID-19 to the Department of Health, WorkSafe, Health and Safety Representatives, and notify your workforce.
 - take all reasonable steps to frequently and regularly clean and disinfect shared spaces
 - undertake risk assessments for cleaning and the potential closure of your workplace in certain situations
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As a worker,
what are my
obligations in
the workplace?

- understand the COVIDSafe Plan for your workplace
 - regularly wash your hands and always practise good hand hygiene
 - where possible within the workplace, aim to maintain physical distancing of 1.5 metres from others
 - follow density quotient and worker caps for your workplace
 - adhere to current face mask requirements
 - do not go to work if you are feeling sick. If you start to feel unwell at work, go home and get tested immediately
 - tell your employer if you test positive to COVID-19
 - regularly clean equipment and shared spaces
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Which workplaces are required to use the Service Victoria QR Code app?

- All workplaces require all visitors and workers to check-in using the free Service Victoria QR Code app with limited exceptions.
 - This is to ensure that if a positive case visits the workplace, contact tracers can simply and rapidly access the details of everyone else who was there at the same time.
 - Contact tracers can then let these people know they have been exposed to a positive case of COVID-19, and what actions to take.
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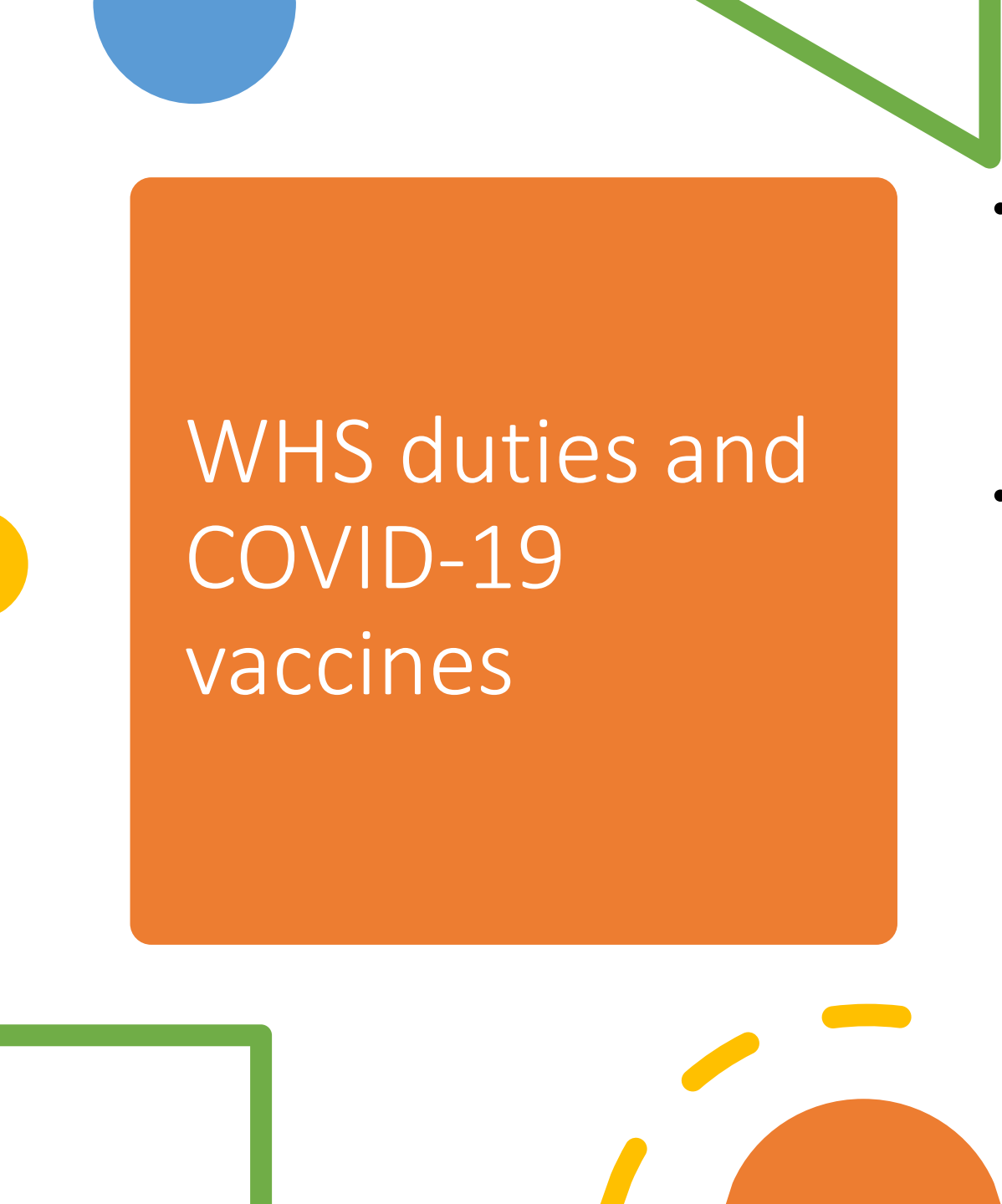
Will businesses be fined if they are not operating the free Service Victoria QR Code app?

- If businesses that are mandated to utilise electronic record-keeping are not operating the free Service Victoria QR Code app, Authorised Officers may issue an on-the-spot \$1,652 fine.
 - In using the Service Victoria QR Code app, businesses will need to make sure the QR code is visible and accessible, and do everything possible to ensure people are checking in – for example, pointing the customer to the QR code and asking them to check in.
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WHS duties and COVID-19 vaccines

- The Australian Government is committed to providing all Australians with access to free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.
 - A vaccine is only one part of keeping the Australian community safe.
 - You must continue to do all that you have been doing in your workplace to stop the spread of COVID-19 including :
 - physical distancing, good hygiene
 - regular cleaning and maintenance
 - using personal protective equipment.
 - continue to make sure your workers do not to attend work if they are unwell.
 - continue to comply with any public health orders that apply to you and your workplace.
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WHS duties and COVID-19 vaccines

- You can encourage your workers to get a COVID-19 vaccination, if they are able to. You can also help your workers find out more information about the vaccines by directing them to the Department of Health website.
 - Some workers may have to get a vaccine under public health orders made by states and territories, for example, for people working in high risk workplaces. If public health orders apply to your business or workers, you must follow them. You should stay up to date with the advice of your health agency.
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Can I require customers and visitors to prove they have been vaccinated before entering my workplace?

- It is unlikely that WHS laws require you to ask customers and visitors for proof of vaccination.
 - If you want customers and visitors to be vaccinated as a condition of entry to your premises you should seek advice before you take any action as there may be privacy and discrimination issues that apply.
 - For more information on privacy, go to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website. For more information on anti-discrimination laws, go to the Australian Human Rights Commission website.
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Do I need to include mandatory vaccination as a control measure to comply with my WHS duties?

- It is unlikely that a requirement to be vaccinated will be reasonably practicable.
 - This is because, for example:
 - at present, public health experts, such as the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has not recommended a vaccine be made mandatory in your industry
 - there may not yet be a vaccine available for your workers, or
 - some of your workers have medical reasons why they cannot be vaccinated.
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Some of my workers cannot be vaccinated because of medical conditions. How do I protect my unvaccinated workers from COVID-19?

- A safe and effective COVID-19 vaccination is only one part of keeping the Australian community safe.
 - You must continue to implement all reasonably practicable control measures in your workplace, such as such as physical distancing, good hygiene and increased cleaning and maintenance.
 - You must also conduct a risk assessment to determine whether particular working arrangements should be put in place for workers who cannot be vaccinated.
 - You should take into account the worker's specific characteristics, the nature of your workplace and the type of work the worker performs.
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Questions?



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