COVID-19 and mining operations

Factsheet

Managing mining operations during COVID-19

Employers must have measures in place to eliminate or manage the risks arising from COVID-19. You must do all that is reasonably practicable to eliminate, and if that's not possible, to minimise the risk.

The NSW Government's Public Health Orders are frequently updated based on the evolving situation in NSW. Employers are strongly encouraged to review the orders on a regular basis as they are updated on the NSW Health website.

Movement of workers to mine and exploration sites

Where stay-at-home restrictions apply, a person can only be away from home with a reasonable excuse.

Travelling to attend work where it is not possible to work from home (i.e. an employee working at an exploration site or mine site) is considered a reasonable excuse under the Public Health Orders. It is recommended that employers provide workers with a letter which states their work cannot be performed from home, which may assist in situations where a worker is stopped by police for compliance checks while travelling to and from their workplace.

Employers should also consider what high-level options are available to better support workers who may find themselves in this situation. This should involve direct liaison with local authorities to ensure there is a clear understanding on how Health Orders will be enforced on a local level and that the local authorities understand how many workers and contractors travel from outside the LGA.

A worker living in one of the declared areas of concern cannot leave their local government area (LGA) to attend work unless they are an authorised worker as determined by NSW Health. Within these areas of concern, an employer must require their staff to work from home, if reasonably practicable. An employer who does not require employees to work from home when they are reasonably able to do so may be fined.

Visiting regional and rural NSW for the purposes of work

Workers may enter regional and rural NSW from Greater Sydney if they are undertaking work that cannot reasonably be undertaken from home. Greater Sydney is now defined as Sydney, inclusive of the Blue Mountains and Wollongong, but is **not** inclusive of the Central Coast and Shellharbour.

A permit system to enter regional NSW in certain circumstances will be introduced from 12:01am on Saturday 21 August.

All workers from Greater Sydney needing to travel more than 50km will need to hold a travel permit if they wish to work in regional NSW and cannot work from home.

This requirement will not apply to those working within a 50km radius of Greater Sydney.

When planning work and travel, regardless of what is permitted by Health Orders, employers should seriously consider the current heightened sensitivity of regional communities to COVID-19 risk, particularly those more remote communities in the west of the state. There may a reluctance or refusal in these communities to provide accommodation or other services, based on where workers are travelling from.

Employers should give these communities as long a lead time as practical when organising work, and be prepared to provide supporting information, such as COVIDSafe plans, to give those local service providers the required level of confidence that the risk of Covid will be managed

appropriately. Conversely in planning travel, employers need to ensure that accommodation services also have appropriate COVIDSafe procedures in place.

Testing requirements for workers from Greater Sydney

A worker from Greater Sydney must not enter a work premises more than 50 kilometres outside Greater Sydney unless the worker has been tested for COVID-19 in the previous 7 days and carries evidence of the test for inspection.

This requirement does not presently apply to workers leaving other areas subject to stay-at-home orders in other parts of NSW.

Employers outside of Greater Sydney must not permit a worker from Greater Sydney to enter work premises unless the worker has been tested in accordance with requirements. The worker must be able to provide evidence of their most recent test result.

A worker must provide information, including proof of address and proof of testing, to a police officer on request to determine if the person is an affected worker or a Greater Sydney worker.

In the event of a positive COVID-19 case on site

There have now been several recent instances where workers, while at their workplace, have either received advice of a positive COVID-19 test result, or that they are a close-contact. Key lessons from these incidents are detailed below.

Workers who have had a COVID-19 test on the basis they are symptomatic must self-isolate in accordance with health directions.

Workers who have had a test as a precautionary surveillance measure, whether voluntarily, at the request of an employer, or to comply with the health order, should also self-isolate until they receive their test result. In these circumstances, the potential delay in getting a result should be considered.

Workers who are notified of a positive test result, whether on site or not, need to report the notification to their employer as soon as possible upon receipt of the result.

In the situation where a mine worker who has tested positive is on site, or has been on site, the mine must contact NSW Health to establish further actions. This is important to protect other workers on site, to assist NSW Health in identifying all people who will be classified as close contacts, and organise how these workers are tested and isolated for the 14 days as required by the Public Health Orders.

In each incident, it was highlighted that employers should have procedures developed and implemented to effectively address the following:

- the ability to quickly and safely isolate the worker and their close contacts to prevent potential further spreading of the virus.
- arrangements to effectively control entry and exit to site while parts of the mine or groups of workers are subject to temporary isolation.
- the provision of sustenance and temporary accommodation in the event the requirement to isolate workers is prolonged beyond a normal shift
- the establishment of designated areas or zones that can be classified as “clean zones” for external agencies (e.g., NSW Health) to utilise, which are segregated from the normal operating areas of the mine

Managing close and casual contacts on site

The likelihood that a mine or exploration site is completely shut down for a close contact compared to a positive COVID-19 case should be considered low, however employers must be prepared for the possibility that a close contact has moved extensively through the workforce or later returns a positive result to the COVID-19 test.

Where a person who is classified as a close contact has attended, or is at a site, employer needs to follow the advice of NSW Health and assist the worker, if necessary, to ensure they are safely tested and isolated in consideration of the previous points.

Anyone who has been in contact with a notified close contact is classified as a secondary close contact. Secondary close contacts must also be identified, have a COVID-19 test and isolate until they receive a negative result.

Other considerations to assist in managing Covid incidents

Employers should place a priority on liaising with local emergency services, the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) and other local service providers (e.g. transport and bus companies) to ensure a mutual understanding of how all parties will respond in the event of a COVID-19 incident at the site.

Effective and timely communication will be imperative in dealing with an incident on site. Communication protocols are required to facilitate the provision of concise and timely information to workers, their families and the local community about the mine's response to a COVID-19 incident.

Employers should have arrangements in place with a cleaning contractor, or maintain adequate stocks of appropriate cleaning supplies and PPE on site to complete any deep cleaning that is required and ensure that staff who undertake this cleaning are appropriately trained to undertake the task

Employers need to consider how workers will safely return home or to accommodation following potentially extended periods at work, considering journey distances and the availability of other services including buses, etc during the current outbreak.

Employers should consider ongoing requirements to maintain a safe working environment for all workers on the site during a COVID-19 related incident, including any inspections that may be needed.

Employers should consider the provision of meaningful support services to assist directly affected workers and their families.

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