

Stage 4 COVID-19 Restrictions

Briefing Paper

Urban Development Institute of Australia (Victoria)

Background

The building, construction and development industry has demonstrated a world-class ability to implement social distancing, safety and hygiene measures effectively, to keep instances of COVID-19 on worksites at a minimum and to swiftly remedy any outbreaks in the industry.

The industry employs over 300,000 people, contributes over 45% of the state's taxation revenue, and is a fundamental part of keeping the Victorian economy strong through the pandemic and ready to rebound on the way out. Throughout the pandemic period, the industry has remained open and operational and the Victorian Government has classified building and construction sites as an Essential Service.

Hundreds of thousands of Victorians, and the entire Victorian economy, relies on the building, construction and development industry staying open and operational.

On 28 July 2020 employer associations and unions wrote to Premier Andrews and the COVID-19 Crisis Council of Cabinet demonstrating that the industry can keep our workforce and industry safe and keep many hundreds of businesses viable during and after this pandemic.

The actions the industry have collectively taken has enabled us to manage the challenges of COVID-19 and have strengthened our capacity for recovery. A copy of this important letter is attached.

Recommendations

- 1. UDIA Victoria strongly urges the Victorian Government to maintain the building, construction and development industry as an Essential Industry and to keep it open and operating throughout the Stage 4 restrictions.*
- 2. Immediately introduce mandatory enhanced worksite management practises to minimise the risk of a case of COVID-19 on a worksite and to rapidly remedy any case that is identified.*
- 3. To further bolster ongoing safe operations, introduce and deploy immediately a consistent contact tracing to be deployed immediately across the building, construction and development industry.*

Stage 4 Restrictions

On 2 August 2020, the Victorian Government declared a State of Disaster in Victoria and announced that workplaces and industries would be dealt with as follows:

- 1. Tier 1 - No impact:** Some industries and businesses will be classified as essential industries and will stay open throughout Stage 4 restrictions.
- 2. Tier 2 - Reduce total output:** Other industries will reduce total output by having less people working less shifts, leading to less contact between people.
- 3. Tier 3 - Close completely:** There will be industries that will close completely.

The Building, Construction and Development Industry Can Safely Keep Working

The building, construction and development industry has taken a leadership role in the development of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines, which have been adopted and agreed by unions and industry associations and endorsed by the Building Industry Consultative Council. The Guidelines are also overseen by WorkSafe, DHHS and the Victorian Building Authority.

Immediately following the declaration of a State of Emergency in Victoria on 16 March 2020, the building, construction and development industry took steps to collaborate between employer associations, unions and WorkSafe to develop and iterate key Guidelines that:

- Provide direction to employers and workers;
- Outline the steps to be taken to best provide a safe and healthy environment; and
- Identify the action available in the event of interruption to building and construction work, as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

These Guidelines are at the forefront of helping us to manage worksites and workplace safety, and they continue to be developed and improved to reflect best practise, and rolled out across building, construction and development sites. Our collaborative approach on the Guidelines has enabled fast deployment of critical site management measures such as temperature testing, site entry procedures and wearing of masks.

The Guidelines are intended to have application across all sectors of the building and construction industry. They have been critically important and highly effective in guiding business and individuals responsible for the health, safety and wellbeing of workers and worksites.

Overall, the building, construction and development industry has:

- Demonstrated an ability to highly manage workplaces with detailed protocols and procedures;
- Implemented proactive management measures such as onsite voluntary testing, temperature testing and use of masks, and detailed workforce training, briefing and communication;
- Demonstrated through rigorous data that the physical characteristics of worksites, coupled with the implementation of the Worksite Guidelines, present an extremely low risk of COVID-19 transmission and there have been minimal cases linked to these settings;
- Adapted without question to operating with increased workplace controls and systems, checks and balances; and
- Remained open to and encouraging of WorkSafe and the Department of Health and Human Services involvement and in taking a more hands-on role throughout the industry.

As a result of this proactive and effective management (accurate at 28 July 2020):

- Positive cases of COVID-19 on building, construction and development worksites remain very low in comparison to the overall cases in the Victorian community.
- While overall cases in Victoria are still increasing, cases identified in the building, construction and development industry have remained low throughout the pandemic.
- Construction workers appear to account for only 0.02% of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to date according to analysis done by DHHS' Industry Liaison Officer for the building, construction and development industry.

- Construction employees are more than five times less likely to contract COVID-19 than the total Victorian population.
- Since the start of the pandemic, a total of 34 building, construction and development sites have reported employees known to have contracted COVID-19, and only four of these sites appear have reported on-site transmission.
- Since the start of the pandemic, across these sites, to the extent that it has been able to be confirmed, there have been a total of 48 positive cases within the building, construction and development industry, with less than 28% thought to be from a 'close contact' on site and the remainder originating from community transmission.

The clear lack of worksite transmission of cases further demonstrates the resolve and effectiveness of measures taken across the building, construction and development industry.

Worksite Differences

Building, construction and development worksites have different practical management challenges depending on their setting, the density of their workforce, and the practical realities of people movement around a site.

A 'greenfield development site' is very different to a 'high-rise' construction worksite, whilst low and medium density, and domestic settings are different again. These differences are important to consider when contemplating measures that deal with the pandemic in Victoria.

At a high level, and given the outdoor nature of greenfield developments, no more than 20 employees are on site at any given time. The average area of a typical 30 lot development is 2ha (1 person per 1,000m²). Although many activities are completed in small teams of 3-4 persons, social distancing of 1 person per 4m² can easier be achieved and is standard practice.

The nature of the civil, landscaping, and maintenance works in open-air environments mean that social distancing (and 4m² per person) protocols are easily manageable and are considered to be low-risk occupations relative to the potential to spread COVID-19.

High-rise and high-density building and construction sites are often managed and run by large commercial builders, who are well managed and resourced to ensure that the most rigorous procedures are adhered to by all entering and working on site. The unique settings of these worksites present difference challenges, for example riding hoists and lifts to the workface and sharing of mess sheds. However, even in these circumstances these sites have observed the 1 person per 4m² right the outset of the pandemic.

Enhance Worksite Management Practices Immediately

UDIA Victoria recommends the immediate introduction of enhanced worksite management practises if greater physical distancing and reduced movement of people is required during Stage 4 restrictions:

1. Create clear workforce split shifts to halve or reduce the number of people on site at any one time;
2. Separate change over times to limit the crossover of workers;
3. Extend worksite hours as of right on building, construction and development sites to allow for productivity to continue;

4. Require the use of a contact tracing apps or digital platform as a condition of entry (just as temperature testing is currently deployed) to a worksite, to track the movement of individuals and tradespeople across worksites (in many cases, this is currently being done manually);
5. Require all building construction and development sites to proactively produce a daily contract tracing summary of the individuals on site, site to provide more thorough information of who they may have had contact with that day and be able to produce this immediately when called on;
6. Require all building, construction and development sites to extend sign-in questions to include whether an individual's family is leaving home for other essential work, and make this a condition of site entry;
7. Implement a broadcast communication protocol to inform workers if there is a case of COVID-19 identified on a worksite;
8. Bolster the resources of the Industry Liaison Officer to the Department of Health and Human Services to enable immediate workplace mapping and contact tracing in the event of an positive test on a worksite;
9. Mandate the immediate closure of a worksite if there is a case of COVID-19, implement deep cleaning protocols, require all workers to be tested and provide a negative test, and apply rigorous checks before the impacted worksite can reopen, including only allowing workers back on site once they have produced a negative test.

Contact Tracing

A key element to keeping the industry open and operating safely will be the ability to undertake contact tracing and workplace mapping of tradespeople and workers.

To date, this has been done manually by the industry's Industry Liaison Officer working with the Department of Health and Human Services.

We need a consistent, automated system that is rigorous and can provide confidence and adequate tools to identify and respond to a case of COVID-19 identified on a worksite.

Examples of the platforms that could be used for immediate deployment include:

1. Housing Industry Association – Site Manger for COVID-19

<https://hia.com.au/covid-19/managing-workplace-safety-and-employees-mental-health/making-space-on-site/site-manager-for-covid-19>

Site Manager for COVID-19 is a digital tool to help businesses manage site sign-in procedures on a building site. Site Manager:

- allows builders and trade contractors to easily create and keep records of who has visited a site and when.
- provides builders and trade contractors with the assurance they need to meet the COVID-19 record keeping obligations.

Anyone wanting to manage site access and maintain a daily record of visitors to a building site, display home, office or workplace, can use Site Manager for COVID-19.

Site Manager for COVID-19 uses the **HIA Safescan QR code** technology to facilitate contactless recording of individual site attendees.

Anyone attending the site can easily and quickly sign-in using Site Manager which provides the builder with an immediate digital record including the site location, date, time and the individual's contact details. A tailored site sign is provided to place at the entry point of a site providing a simple sign-in facility for all visitors to the site.

2. 1Breadcrumb

<https://1breadcrumb.com>

Create a secure, digital, geofenced site for subcontractors, staff, suppliers and visitors to check in and out of. Tailor your entry and exit criteria via your company webportal. Create public sites for self check in ability, or create a private site and display your QR code in store or onsite. Create personalised check-in questions, host live toolbox meetings and display announcements to collect and disperse important information to those checking in.

In the current COVID-19 climate, having access a list of people who were on site at any one time is extremely important. But the feature and benefits will last long past Covid times.

For construction in particular, 1Breadcrumb provides a simple and time specific workplace mapping tool that gives managers an understanding about movements on site so that should a subcontractor, supplier or site supervisor test positive for COVID-19, a targeted isolation strategy can be implemented.

This saves an entire site being shut down, as businesses can be confident about who the infected patron came into contact with. This allows those who were not on site during the infected person's check in timeframe to continue working, and businesses to remain open and get the job done.

We look forward to continuing to advise the Victorian Government throughout this critically important time. Please do not hesitate to contact Danni Hunter on 0400 230 787 to discuss this further.



Danni Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

Urban Development Institute Australia (Victoria)
Level 4, 437 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 3004

P. 0400 230 787

E. danni@udiavic.com.au