

Downs Industry Schools Co-operation Inc (DISCO)

COVID-19 - Risk Mitigation Plan



March 2020

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak a Pandemic on the 11th of March 2020. New cases of the virus continue to be reported each day and there needs to be reasonable action taken by staff and clients to minimise the transmission of the virus. All DISCO offices will take all reasonable steps possible to minimise the transmission of the virus and contribute to the overall Australian effort in preventing a further outbreak.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness with symptoms ranging from mild flu-like symptoms to severe respiratory distress. The symptoms of COVID-19 mirror that of a common flu-like or influenza illness with a long incubation period of up to 14 days.

The following are the symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever
- Flu-like symptoms (including, but not limited to, coughing, sore throat and fatigue)
- Shortness of breath

While it is acknowledged that this reflects the symptoms of Influenza/common cold, the following are additional risks in identifying a confirmed COVID-19 case:

- Recent travel overseas
- Been in contact with someone that has a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Over the age of 70 years old
- People with co-morbidities

Transmission

COVID-19 is transferred through droplet form. This means that when someone with COVID-19 produces droplets from talking, coughing, breathing etc. droplets are formed on nearby surfaces. This can include anything from a desk, telephone or biro; to items that retain water/fluid. The virus is transmitted by someone touching these contaminated surfaces and then touching their face/nose/mouth and introducing the virus into the person's body. Transmission can also occur if someone with COVID-19 coughs/projects droplets into the vicinity of another person (approximately 1.5 metres).

Approximately 80% of people that have contracted COVID-19 have experienced mild symptoms and made a full recovery from the virus. Although the symptoms may have been mild, the transmission of the virus is still possible, comprising the health of high-risk people, particularly the elderly and people with co-morbidities.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

There are simple and cost-effective ways to minimise the transmission of COVID-19. This includes, but is not limited to:

- If you have flu-like symptoms, **do not go to work or communal areas**. Note – flu-like symptoms do not confirm a diagnosis of COVID-19. Contact your General Practitioner or local health authority for further guidance. Ensure that you notify your employer/manager and take the necessary precautions to recover.
- If there is an indication that you have COVID-19 (as indicated above), contact your local health authority/General Practitioner. Ensure that you phone ahead of your arrival to forewarn staff that you may have the virus. Upon arrival, apply a mask (that should be available onsite) and follow the directions of health staff.
- Practice regular and proper hand hygiene. Use of an alcohol-based hand sanitiser and/or soap/water before and after touching communal surfaces should be done.
- Practice good cough etiquette. Cough/sneeze into the sleeve of your shirt and in the opposite direction to other people. Ensure you use a tissue to blow your nose and dispose of it appropriately. Follow this with appropriate hand hygiene.
- Maintain social distancing of at least 1.5 metres and avoid handshakes/hugs with people
- Minimise unnecessary travel. If you are travelling overseas, ensure you check the Smart Traveller website (<https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/>).

DISCO contingency planning

The main priority during this situation is the health and safety of all staff and clients. There also needs to be consideration about the Mental Health of young people accessing services at DISCO offices. The following measures will be taken to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 amongst staff and clients.

Hand hygiene station

A hand hygiene station or anti-bacterial point will be set up at the entrance to each DISCO office. There is to be a sign at the location, requesting visitors to complete hand hygiene (Refer example in DISCO Risk Management Plan).

Office hygiene

All locations each day should be wiped down with antibacterial cloths to minimise the potential spread of the virus. Please ensure when wiping down surfaces that gloves and anti-bacterial wipes are used and if antibacterial wipes are not available, a damp cloth with soap and warm water is to be used to clean the surface. Regularly used items and accessed surfaces are to be cleaned at a minimum three times a day with an antibacterial wipe. Please ensure that when completed that hands are washed thoroughly.

Team members are to minimise the sharing of their biros/pens with clients. Dedicated biros/pens are to be provided for use by clients.

Appointments and training

Appointments and training across all programs will continue unless the direction to cancel appointments is made by the DISCO management team. Staff providing face-to-face support sessions are to use a social distancing of (minimum) 1.5 metres during these meetings. If a client expresses concern to the officer that they may have COVID-19, the Site Coordinator/Area Manager is to be contacted who will contact the Operations Manager who in turn may contact the local health authority for further advice. Immediate measures are to be taken to minimise the spread of the virus. This is to include:

- Identifying an appropriate COVID-19 clinic
- Isolating the client to a separate Meeting Room and organise for this location to be closed off
- Following the direction of local health authorities
- Assist the client to access support

Staff that encounter the suspected COVID-19 case are to contact the Site Coordinator or Area Manager who will then advise the Operations Manager who will contact the respective health authority and provide further instructions.

It is likely that clients, staff members and stakeholders may be directed to attend a fever clinic at one of the following locations if they need to be checked:

- **Dalby Hospital**
- **Gatton Hospital**
- **Toowoomba General Hospital (Bailey Henderson Quarantine Assessment Site)**

Individuals will then commence a quarantine period of 14 days and will be further monitored by the external health authorities.

The Operations Manager will inform the CEO to determine whether services can continue, or if the site requires temporary closure.

Currently we are exploring the possibility of having some or all appointments with clients undertaken remotely via Phone/Facetime or utilising email to minimise the risk of transmission at our sites. It is possible that we may close some sites in advance of the peak of the pandemic to minimise the impact and if this decision is made, we will advise you accordingly. Obviously, this will create challenges, but it will also provide us with a greater chance of minimising the transmission of the virus to staff and clients. It also may offer us greater flexibility to continue delivering levels of support to clients and may prevent the need for us to temporarily close sites if or when the pandemic reaches its peak.

In the interim and effective immediately, both the TtW and YES programs are to contact all clients the day preceding an appointment and state the following message:

Hello its (NAME) here from DISCO. I'm just calling to confirm your appointment tomorrow at (INSERT TIME) at the (INSERT OFFICE).

I just need to check a few things before we confirm your attendance tomorrow. Have you been overseas in the last 21 days? How are you feeling? Do you have any of the following symptoms: cough, temperature, runny nose or aches and pains? Have you been around anyone who has been sick recently or displayed some of the symptoms outlined?

Now it's important to note that the appointment can proceed as normal if the client responds negatively to these questions. If, however, there is some uncertainty or a question is answered with a yes, the face to face appointment should be converted to a phone appointment and the client should NOT attend the meeting in person.

Organisational activities, community events and social gatherings

Specific and planned DISCO related activities with clients in the weeks and months ahead will be assessed in advance of their scheduled delivery date to assess if they are safe to run. Community events and social gatherings will continue to be monitored. The continuation of public events is being evaluated on a day-to-day basis. DISCO will adopt this measure and be guided by Government and continue with current community events and social events. Unless otherwise indicated by the Site Coordinator/Area Manager, planned events will continue as scheduled. If Social Distancing is advised by Government, all events will be reviewed and potentially cancelled. During the conduct of all DISCO-supported events, DISCO staff will advise young people to take the appropriate measures (indicated above) in minimising the transmission of COVID-19.

Unwell staff member due to COVID-19

If a staff member falls ill due to the possibility of contracting COVID-19, the staff member will need to take leave until they recover and/or the quarantine period has concluded. For staff that can work from home, continuation of work will be dependent on:

- Are they well enough to continue to work?
- Do they have meaningful work to do from home?
- Do they have the necessary equipment to continue work from home (work laptop and stable Internet connection)?

The decision as to whether work from home can be adopted is at the discretion of the Area Manager, in consultation with the Operations Manager. This should only be for staff that are in Quarantine due to possible/confirmed COVID-19 and under the direction of a General Practitioner.

Reduced staffing at DISCO offices

There is a likelihood that staff will contract COVID-19, thereby limiting the ability to provide ongoing services. All DISCO staff should consider the health and well-being of other staff in the building, therefore not attend work while unwell. If there is reason for a staff member to be in quarantine for 14 days, the Area Manager will notify the Operations Manager of the reduced staffing level. If this decision impacts on Risk Management and Safety at the site, the Operations Manager will consult with the CEO to ascertain if the Site should be closed temporarily.

The priority for DISCO is maintaining the safety of young people and staff. Support for clients will continue where possible and this may include the use of phones or email to enable support to continue. Any decision to approve this will be made by the Operations Manager. Staff are not expected to work beyond their means in meeting the workload created due to other unwell staff. The ongoing health and well-being of all staff will continue to be monitored by the Operations Manager.

DISCO office temporary closure

At the direction of the CEO or Operations Manager, a DISCO site may need to temporarily close. The decision to close a centre will be made after careful consideration and in consultation with the Executive

of the DISCO Management Committee, Operations Manager and CEO. The Operations Manager and/or CEO will then take action to coordinate notification to clients, staff, stakeholders and Government Contract Managers.

Communication

It is vital that our organisation is keeping up to date with advice published by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Queensland Health. This will continue to be monitored by the CEO.

Contact with job seekers or program participants potentially affected by COVID-19

If a job seeker/participant contacts your organisation to indicate that they are *unable to meet their requirements due to a need to self-isolate* in line with Department of Health advice, your staff must ensure the job seeker has no requirements in the near future. The job seeker/participant should also be encouraged to call, but not attend, Centrelink in the first instance to seek an exemption from mutual obligation requirements (where this may apply).

Where a job seeker/participant contacts Centrelink to advise they are in isolation, a Major Personal Crisis exemption may be granted for a period of 14 days. Supporting evidence will not be required for this initial exemption as long as this falls within the Department of Health advice regarding grounds for self-isolation. If the job seeker/participant is required to remain in isolation beyond this period, then they may need to make phone contact with DISCO or Centrelink again.

If a job seeker/participant contacts your organisation to advise they are *unwell or may have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and may need to self-isolate*, again, it is important for us to change any appointments or activities scheduled in the near future – including in the IT system to ensure they do not have their payments suspended. The job seeker/participant should also be directed to call, but not attend, Centrelink to discuss obtaining a Major Personal Crisis exemption (using the contact numbers below:

- Newstart Allowance, JobSeeker Payment and Special Benefit recipients can call 132 850.
- Youth Allowance recipients can call 132 490.
- Parenting Payment recipients with mutual obligation requirements can call 136 150.

In circumstances where we have information that a *job seeker/participant has recently returned from a listed country or has been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 but has not self-isolated*, the job seeker/participant can be directed to not attend or to leave the premises. Adjustments should be made to ensure they have no requirements to attend appointments or activities in the near future. In such circumstances, the job seeker or participant should be advised to call, but not attend, Centrelink to seek an exemption. If a site closure is warranted, the department will deploy a streamlined approach to ensure this can be actioned quickly.

In the event that it may be necessary to close a DISCO site, landlines will be transferred to the Site Coordinator's mobile phone or the office mobile. In the event that this individual is unavailable, the phone will be diverted to the Area or Operations Manager's mobile phones.

A teleconference will take place each day between the Area Managers and the Operations Manager to ensure all issues relevant to staffing and clients are reviewed. This will continue indefinitely whilst the Risk Management Plan remains in operation.

For staff with the ability to work from home, the Area Managers will be in contact with them each day and report back to the Operations Manager as part of the daily teleconference to provide an update on progress. This is to be meaningful work and will rely on the integrity of staff. During the closure of any site, all DISCO activities and events where support may have been offered to other organisations will be unavailable and this will require Site Coordinators/Area Managers to review diaries to ensure organisations can be contacted and advised of DISCO's temporary office closure and inability to provide support.

Adhering to Government or Organisational Directions

It is extremely important to remember that if you are provided with a lawful direction by a Senior DISCO staff

member as a result of either an internal management decision and/or a direction from the World Health Organisation or the State or Commonwealth Health Department, that you must follow this direction.

Please be aware that if you refuse to follow this direction it may result in the termination of your employment.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak has demonstrated that the virus can be easily transmitted from person-to-person. This plan aims to enable the continuation of services during the COVID-19 outbreak without compromising the health of staff or clients. Staff and clients can contribute to the reduction of this outbreak by practicing good hand hygiene, good cough etiquette, maintaining appropriate social distancing between other people and keeping up to date with the latest health advice.

Resources

Australian Government – Department of Health - <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

World Health Organisation - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>