

# Workplace safety, the 'new normal' and COVID-19

*The first priority during the COVID-19 pandemic has been crisis response with an emphasis on health and safety, essential services, and mobilising workforces where possible. COVID-19 is no longer an unforeseeable hazard, it's very real and needs to be considered as such.*

Australia has been successful in flattening the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions are being lifted. Many WA local governments are looking to return operations to a 'new normal.'

COVID-19 is now a known hazard and local governments need to ensure they take reasonable, practicable steps to mitigate the safety risk associated with the virus during the recovery phase. This will require focus, commitment, leadership and coordination.

## Three phases

Essentially there are three phases facing organisations amid the COVID-19 outbreak:



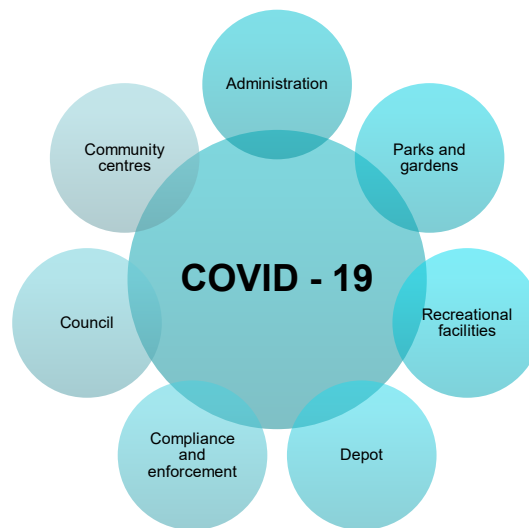
## What does West Australian legislation say?

The WA *Occupational Safety and Health Act* and regulations place a duty on local governments to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees. Broadly speaking this encompasses the following:

- Maintain workplaces free from hazards and ensure safe systems of work
- Provide information, instruction, training and supervision
- Consult and cooperate with workers
- Identify each likely hazard (COVID-19) that a person will be exposed to in the workplace
- Assess the risk of injury resulting from the hazard (COVID-19)
- Consider the means by which the risk may be reduced
- Provide PPE for those hazards where it is not practicable to avoid them
- Risks assessed and mitigated in the use of plant and substances

## What does that mean for WA local governments?

WA local governments provide diverse community services so it's important that each are assessed for the hazard of COVID-19.



## OSH Challenges

Local governments are likely to face a number of new OSH challenges in the recovery stage. COVID-19 is a hazard which will continue to change the 'way we do things' and have an impact on mental health. Local governments need to consider:

- Mental, physical and emotional well being
- Reopening / getting back to 'normal' – aiming to thrive in a new environment
- Managing public interaction
- Introducing new work practices and the way things are done
- Plant and equipment / new substances
- Workers distraction
- Illnesses at work
- Vulnerable workers

## Safe work environments

To ensure local governments provide a safe work environment, they will need to embed COVID-19 mitigation changes within existing safety systems

<b>Policy and planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate your commitment to keeping workers safe</li><li>• Consider developing a response plan bringing strategies together to provide a cohesive approach</li><li>• Follow the advice of experts</li><li>• Keep everyone informed – consultation and communication are incredibly important</li></ul>
<b>Risk assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Map the operational hazards to identify key exposure areas and activities</li><li>• Group job profiles based on level of risk</li><li>• Review against any existing risk profiles</li><li>• Incorporate the risk of potential interactions, with workers, contractors, supplier and visitors</li><li>• Your risk assessment should guide your strategy and decision making</li></ul>
<b>Prevention and mitigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental health support</li><li>• Maintain physical distancing</li><li>• Hygiene and cleaning</li><li>• Training</li><li>• Review and adapt existing systems of work</li><li>• Plant and equipment checks</li></ul>
<b>Communication and consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider a central point of information gathering</li><li>• Get information from reliable sources only</li><li>• Regularly consult with OSH committee/reps and disseminate information appropriately</li><li>• Engage workers in your risk mitigation strategies</li><li>• Plan and prepare for the unexpected</li><li>• Review and respond</li></ul>
<b>Plan for the unexpected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How to deal with staff concerns</li><li>• What if there is a positive case within your local government?</li><li>• What happens if someone has flu like symptoms?</li><li>• Can you adequately respond to an incident if one occurs?</li></ul>
<b>Review and respond</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always review your controls to ensure they are working</li><li>• Change your strategy if needed</li><li>• COVID 19 will remain with us for some time, so keep it on the radar, it is a known hazard.</li></ul>

## Support and information

For more support and information contact Emma Horsefield, OSH Program Manager on 0407 957 932 or email [emma.horsefield@lqisw.com.au](mailto:emma.horsefield@lqisw.com.au)