



Australian Government

Geoscience Australia

Communicable Diseases Procedures

TRIM Reference	D2020-34954
Document Version Number	1.0
Policy Owner	Chief, Corporate Division
Responsible Official	Chief Human Resources Officer
Superseded Procedures	Nil
Date Effective	March 2020
Next Review Date	March 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

These procedures define how the Work Health and Safety Policy (the Policy) will be implemented in practice. We care about the safety of our workers and are committed to promoting a safe workplace within Geoscience Australia (organisation).

Geoscience Australia is committed to working in partnership with workers to manage infectious diseases and actively prevent and control communicable disease transmission. This procedure defines how to identify risk, assess the risk and control the risk for communicable diseases in the workplace. It also provides advice on ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, so far as reasonably practicable.

1.2. Scope

This procedure applies to all workers, including contractors and volunteers who may potentially be exposed to a communicable disease during the course of their employment.

1.3. Principles

This procedure is underpinned by the following principles:

- The wellbeing and safety of our workers is paramount.
- Geoscience Australia will support and provide information, resources and procedures to its workers to support a healthy and safe workplace.
- Geoscience Australia will ensure its officers and workers are provided information and resources to successfully understand and fulfil their roles in accordance with the WHS Act.
- Workers will actively participate in identifying, rectifying and evaluating safety issues.
- Geoscience Australia will appropriately manage workplace risks.

2. Procedures

2.1. The management of communicable diseases in the organisation

Aim: To ensure Geoscience Australia effectively responds to communicable disease in the workplace

Policy:

Geoscience Australia will ensure our workers are provided with safe workplaces and exposure to hazards and risks are removed, minimised or managed.

Geoscience Australia will develop and maintain safe working conditions and practices in all Geoscience Australia workplaces.

Procedures:

Geoscience Australia is committed to working in partnership with our workers to ensure safety and wellbeing at work. To achieve this, we take all reasonably practicable steps to protect the health and safety of workers in the planning and delivery of work, consistent with our responsibilities in the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cwth).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states:

communicable, or infectious diseases, are caused by micro-organisms such as bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi that can be spread, directly or indirectly, from one person to another. A variety of disease-producing bacteria and viruses are carried in the mouth, nose, throat and respiratory tract. Different strains of influenza (flu) can be spread by coughing, sneezing, and saliva or mucus on unwashed hands.

A risk management approach to communicable diseases ensures risks are appropriately identified and managed, providing safe and healthy workplaces for our workers.

2.2. Types of communicable disease

Many communicable diseases are common in Australia (for example, influenza) however others are rare (for example, typhoid). Risks to worker exposure may increase during work travel, engaging with overseas stakeholders or exposure to uncontrolled substances or goods.

The mode/s of transmission for communicable diseases differ, and may include more than one that requires management. The mode of transmission for emerging communicable diseases (for example, COVID-19) may not be immediately established, therefore a risk management approach is required to minimise the likelihood of transmission in the workplace.

The below list of common communicable diseases and their primary modes of transmission:

<p>Airborne</p> <p>Transmission occurs through small particles that remain suspended in the air for long periods in droplets or dust. Infection may be caused when inhaled or ingested through the mouth or nose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chicken pox • Measles • Tuberculosis 	<p>Workers should self-isolate until disease is no longer contagious.</p>
<p>Droplet</p> <p>Transmission occurs through larger particles from the respiratory system of an infected person through sneezing, coughing and talking. These particles can carry for approximately one metre before falling from the air and remain active on solid surfaces (for example, may transfer and remain live from surfaces to body)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common cold • Influenza • Meningitis • Mumps • COVID-19 • Streptococcal (sore throat) • Pertussis (whooping cough) 	<p>Workers should ensure vigilance in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Work surfaces should be cleaned regularly.</p>
<p>Ingestion</p> <p>Transmission occurs when ingesting contaminated food or water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholera • Hepatitis A and E • Salmonella infection • Rotavirus infection • Hand, foot and mouth disease 	<p>Workers should ensure appropriate food storage steps are applied.</p> <p>Workers should ensure vigilance in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Work surfaces should be cleaned regularly.</p>
<p>Physical contact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head lice • Ringworm • Scabies 	<p>Workers should ensure vigilance in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Work surfaces should be cleaned regularly.</p>
<p>Secretions</p> <p>Transmission occurs via contact with blood or other bodily fluids through direct injection (needle stick injuries), open wounds (cuts, abrasions), mucous membranes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conjunctivitis • Glandular fever • Hepatitis B and C • Malaria 	<p>Workers should ensure vigilance in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Work surfaces should be cleaned regularly.</p>

(mouth, nose, eyes) or insect bites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meningitis • Ross River Fever • Yellow Fever • Zika Virus 	
<p>Zoonosis</p> <p>Transmission occurs through contact with animals or animal products (for example, skin, waste products, wool or skin).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q Fever • Anthrax • Leptospirosis 	<p>Workers should ensure vigilance in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Work surfaces should be cleaned regularly.</p>

2.3. Prevention of communicable disease transmission in the workplace

The responsibility for being informed on potential communicable disease outbreaks is shared between the organisation and workers. The organisation takes a risk-based approach to managing outbreaks, as identified below.

Workers should ensure that they:

- Remain informed of any communicable disease outbreaks to assist decision making on reasonable precautions required to prevent infection and transmission. This may include remaining up to date with advice from local health authorities (for example, ACT Health) and when travelling, registering and checking the Smartraveller website for updates and any changes.
- Remain vigilant with routine hygiene activities. This includes frequent handwashing with soap and water, regularly cleaning and disinfecting work surfaces, covering cuts or abrasions with dressings at all times while at work, safely disposing of personal hygiene products (for example, used tissues or used bandaids) and avoiding touching the face with hands.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as required and supplied. This includes disposable gloves as required.
- Appropriately store food products to reduce the risk of contamination.
- Consume food and drink products that have not been contaminated. For example, do not consume food that has expired, or water that is of questionable quality.

2.4. Travel and communicable diseases

If a worker becomes unwell, or is exposed to a potential communicable disease during domestic travel, it is recommend that they seek medical advice from a local medical practitioner or hospital.

If travelling internationally, workers should contact [International SOS](#) and quote membership number **12ACMA000001**. The International SOS card should remain with workers at all times.

It is encouraged that workers whilst travelling gather and understand information from local health authorities, control measures, including pharmacological controls. If a worker becomes ill during travel they are to contact their manager and when possible, lodge the incident in the WHS Incident Reporting Tool.

2.5. Following exposure to, or diagnosis of a communicable disease

All workers are required to comply with any reasonable instructions or procedure relating to health and safety at the workplace, and ensure they do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. Workers should remain vigilant in ensuring their health and wellbeing, and seek medical advice and assessment if they become aware of potential exposure or infection as soon as reasonably practicable. Workers should monitor symptoms including general feelings of being unwell (for example, nausea, fatigue, or muscle weakness) or physical symptoms (for example, coughing, sneezing, signs of, unusual skin colour, swelling or oedema, new marks on skin, unexplained bleeding, or changed tongue colour).

2.5.1. Worker with potential symptoms

Workers who identify potential symptoms should seek medical assessment to confirm their condition, and obtain advice on treatment and recovery. This should include whether the worker is able to remain in the workplace, or whether, due to potential transmission risk for others, they should self-isolate.

Workers are to keep their manager informed, and report their symptoms via the WHS incident tool, including the decision to self-isolate. This will ensure the workplace can take appropriate steps to reduce the risk of transmission within the workforce and the community. For example, communicating with colleagues who work in close proximity and may need to self-isolate or seek medical assessment.

2.5.2. Worker with potential exposure

If a worker becomes aware of a potential exposure to another person with a communicable disease, they are to report this immediately via the WHS incident reporting tool. Consideration should be given to minimising exposure of others in the workplace until it is confirmed whether transmission has occurred. This may include self-isolating (for example, working from home, or moving work environments).

2.5.3. Identified suspected non-disclosed exposure

If a manager suspects, or knows, that a worker either has, or has been exposed to a communicable disease, and the worker does not disclose this, the manager may request a medical certificate be provided for a medical practitioner stating that they are fit for duty and direct the worker to work from home until the information can be provided.

Some workers with a communicable disease not impacting their capacity to work (for example, head lice or scabies) may wish to return to work, however are unable to attend the workplace due to their condition. Flexible work options, including working remotely, should be discussed.

2.6. Reporting incidents of exposure to communicable diseases

If a worker becomes unwell, or is exposed to a potential communicable disease, an incident report should be lodged via the WHS incident reporting tool.

2.7. Vulnerable people and communicable diseases

Workers with underlying health conditions that make them more vulnerable to contracting communicable diseases (for example, workers with respiratory or lung disease, suppressed immune systems, particular cultural groups or expectant parents). Workers should consult with their medical practitioner to consider whether ongoing attendance in the workplace is appropriate and seek advice on any additional strategies required to minimise exposure during communicable disease outbreaks.

Flexible working options will be considered for all vulnerable workers including working from home, alternative work location or modified work hours, so far as reasonably practicable. Workers may also choose to self-isolate and access appropriate leave for the duration.

2.8. Privacy

We will only use and disclose worker personal information for the purposes it was collected and in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Geoscience Australia [Privacy Policy and Procedures](#). For example, personal information may need to be disclosed when working in coordination with health authorities to conduct contact tracing to prevent further transmission in the community.

Incident reports and, if required, rehabilitation files containing personal information are stored securely in the organisation's approved record management system. The information within files is only accessible to specific members of Human Resources (HR) responsible for health and wellbeing (for example, Wellbeing and Performance and relevant HR managers). Rehabilitation files are not held within personnel files and do not therefore move with the employee outside of Geoscience Australia.

Electronic records are held for seven years from the date the rehabilitation case is closed, and disposed of by Information Management in accordance with the *Records Disposal Authority*.

3. Procedures

3.1. Risk management approach to managing communicable diseases in the workplace

Aim: To ensure Geoscience Australia appropriately manages risks relating to communicable diseases in the workplace.

Policy:

Geoscience Australia will ensure our workers are provided with safe workplaces and exposure to hazards and risks are removed, minimised or managed.

Geoscience Australia will develop and maintain safe working conditions and practices in all Geoscience Australia workplaces.

Procedures:

Workers have the potential for occupational exposure to communicable disease in the course of their duties, and the risk varies depending on the nature of work performed. It is therefore important to take a risk-based approach to eliminate or minimise hazards in the workplace, including exposure to communicable diseases.

There are four main steps in effective risk management. These include:

1. Hazard identification
2. Risk assessment
3. Risk control
4. Monitor and review

Consultation with workers during the risk management process ensures a collaborative approach to identifying and managing potential hazards, and increases the likely success in the implementation of risk control measures.

3.2. Hazard identification

Managers are responsible for considering the hazards associated with communicable diseases in the planning and delivery of work programs in consultation with workers. Identified hazards should be reviewed regularly, especially in response to epidemic (for example, seasonal influenza) and pandemic events (for example COVID-19) and the review documented to support future monitoring and review.

3.3. Risk assessment

Once a communicable disease hazard or exposure has been identified, a risk assessment should be conducted by the work area on the impact to their workers. In the event of epidemic and pandemic events, the organisation will also conduct a risk assessment to consider the hazards to its programs and workers.

Depending on the nature of the work and environment, this assessment should consider the:

- nature of the disease and its prevalence
- mode of transmission and likelihood of the disease being transmitted in the workplace
- type and frequency of potential exposure to a disease
- workplace layout and practices, and their impact on the risk of exposure (for example, shared offices may increase the risk of exposure to the occupants when compare to open plan work environments due to closeness of proximity)
- risk of serious health effects from exposure
- knowledge and training of workers regarding communicable disease, including safe work practices and supervision
- individual health profiles, including past exposure, vaccination history and susceptibility of workers
- current risk control measures (both locally and organisationally) and the need for new risk control measures.

3.4. Risk control

It is important to ensure that the hazards associated with communicable diseases in our workplace are managed in accordance with the hierarchy of controls identified in the Risk Management Procedures. Depending on the nature of exposure, and significance of risk, more than one control may be required to reduce the risk of infection. These may include:

- elimination of work tasks or activities not considered essential or business critical (for example, delaying non-essential travel to hot spot regions during an epidemic or pandemic)
- substitution of more suitable work methods (for example, conducting meetings via video and telephone conferencing rather than face to face or implementing remote work arrangements), or redesigning work methods
- containing or isolating the source of infection (for example, workers engaging with flexible work options, self-isolation, and/or social distancing)
- immunising workers or providing prophylactic medication based on medical advice
- administrative controls including the adherence to standard precautions and basic infections control (for example, hand washing and cough etiquette)
- implementing personal protective equipment (PPE) usage (for example, use of masks and disposable gloves)

- providing case management support for all workers requiring assistance in their return to work due to the symptoms of a communicable disease.

3.4.1.1 Organisational existing risk control measures

Risks associated with communicable diseases are considered at an organisation level and are managed in accordance with relevant policies and procedures. HR remains informed of emerging and existing health risks to our workers, taking a risk based approach to determining needs and next steps.

In the circumstances of global pandemic events, the organisation has an established Pandemic Response Plan, providing the framework for the response to various scenarios and events. The plan defines communication methods with workers, and identify critical milestones for decision-making requirements. A Management Response Team (MRT) has been established, ensuring representation across the organisation of divisions and critical business units to inform organisational responses in pandemic events. The implementation of the Pandemic Plan is done in conjunction with established Business Continuity Plans.

In response to identified risks associated with the type and locations of work, a number of initiatives already exist to support the prevention of exposure to communicable diseases. These include:

- vaccination programs (for example, annual influenza, yellow fever, hepatitis A and B, cholera, typhoid)
- education for all workers on routine hygiene techniques including hand washing, cough etiquette and universal precautions for the prevention of transmission
- provision of cleaning supplies in all kitchens to enable workers to clean work surfaces
- provision of PPE, as required
- funding for prophylactic medication (for example, anti-malaria medication) for high risk travel environments.

3.5. Monitor and review

The risk assessment and control measures implemented must be regularly reviewed, and if necessary, revised to ensure they are effective in creating work environments and activities that eliminate, or minimise the risks to worker health and safety. All reviews should be recorded in the organisation's approved record management system.

The privacy of personal and medical information is paramount. The *Privacy Act 1988* places a legal obligation all stakeholders to ensure all records are secure against loss, unauthorised access, use, modification, disclosure of misuse.

4. Supporting Information

This section is informative

Roles and Responsibilities

Senior Leadership Team	<p>The Senior Leadership Team are responsible for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, that workers are not exposed to health and safety risks in the course of employment.</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• acquiring and keeping up to date knowledge of work health and safety matters, including existing and emerging communicable disease events.• ensuring appropriate resources and processes available, that is used to identify, eliminate or minimise risks to health and safety• ensuring effective and timely identification of hazards across the organisation to enable timely responses and actions to be identified and implemented as required.• ensuring resources and processes are verified, monitored and reviewed.• working collaboratively with other senior leaders and managers to ensure appropriate systems and supports to ensure safe work environments.
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<p>Managers</p>	<p>Managers are responsible for providing support, advice and assistance to workers in the workplace, working proactively and flexibly to identify and manage risks to safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying hazards through a risk management approach, in consultation with workers, to eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to communicable diseases • reviewing risk control measures to confirm effectiveness • ensuring workers have access to, and are aware of potential hazards in the workplace, including risk of or exposure to communicable diseases • in conjunction with workers, regularly reviewing work requirements and planned activities to confirm suitability or adjustment to address safety concerns • maintaining risk management records • ensuring appropriate reporting of worker exposure to communicable diseases via the WHS incident reporting tool.
<p>Workers</p>	<p>Workers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and ensure that they do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons. This include complying with reasonable instructions relating to work health and safety in the workplace.</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assisting management in identifying workplace hazards • reporting exposure of incidents, or diagnosis of communicable diseases via the WHS incident reporting tool as soon as reasonably practicable. • complying with any reasonable direction from their manager to reduce the risk of exposure to a communicable disease. • remaining informed of health updates and alerts (for example, local health area alerts and Department of Health updates).

Related Policies

Privacy Policy	Information about how Geoscience Australia manages personal information it collects, how individuals may access and collect such information, and how individuals may complain about a breach of the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs).
Work Health and Safety Policy	Policy about how Geoscience Australia manages the application of the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> .

Related Procedures

Work Health and Safety Procedures	Geoscience Australia's commitment and agreed procedures to comply with the Work Health and Safety legislation.
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Definitions

Term	Definition
Communicable diseases	An infectious disease transmissible (as from person to person) by direct contact with an affected individual or the individual's discharges or by indirect means.
Contact tracing	<p>The process of identifying any person (contacts) a worker may have had contact with that may result in the transmission of serious communicable disease or infection.</p> <p>This process aims to stop diseases and infections spreading further through the community by identifying, diagnosing and treating potential infected persons.</p>
Hand hygiene	A general term referring to any action of hand cleaning it includes hand washing with soap and waters or using alcohol based hand sanitiser.
Infectious disease	Diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms, including bacteria, varuses, parasites or fungi. The diseases can be spread directly or indirectly form one person to another.
Influenza vaccination	Vaccine against influenza that typically contains a mixture of strains of influenza virus cultured in chick embryos.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	Anything used or worn by a person to minimise risk to the person's health and safety. For example gloves, masks or overalls.

Respiratory hygiene (sometimes known as 'cough etiquette')	<p>Terms used to describe infection prevention measures including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing • using tissues and disposing of them appropriately • attending to hand hygiene immediately after coughing sneezing or blowing.
Standard precautions	A method of risk control where all human blood and fluids are managed as though known to be highly infectious. It includes personal hygiene practices, particularly hand washing, use of PPE and safe disposal systems for sharps and contaminated matter.
Symptomatic	Showing signs of illness, disease or injury.

Change history

Version	Date	Change

Appendix A – Frequently asked questions

- **What precautions should I take?**

Vigilance in routine hygiene is crucial to minimising the risk of contamination for many communicable diseases. For example, hand washing and drying (especially following coughing and nose hygiene and before touching food or eating). The use of soap and water has been shown to be more effective in preventing virus transmission than alcohol based hand sanitiser. This includes the use of anti-bacterial hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser is however a good alternative where hand washing is unavailable and hands are not visibly soiled.

The use of disposable tissues, not sharing eating and drinking utensils and seeking medical review if symptomatic are also important precautions to take in the prevention of transmission.

- **What are the organisation's cleaning arrangements?**

The organisation has a number of existing cleaning arrangements including regular mopping, vacuuming of floors and wiping/dusting of hard surfaces in communal areas daily. As part of building maintenance, there is also an ongoing program of steam cleaning of floors and chairs.

Workers should wipe their workstations on a regular basis and are encouraged to do so more regularly during periods of higher contamination (for example, during influenza season or pandemic outbreaks). Cleaning surface sprays are available for workers in all kitchens.

If a worker has been diagnosed with a communicable disease, arrangements may be made for targeted cleaning of that area.

- **Should anyone else remain home from work?**

It is recommended that any worker remain at home until their symptoms resolve. This prevents the spread of respiratory illnesses. Any worker who has taken time off for an illness, but has not been confirmed with a communicable disease, or has not been told to self-isolate, can return to work when they are well.

- **How do I manage a person with pre-existing medical conditions or expecting mothers?**

Workers who are in these categories should be encouraged to seek advice from their health care professional.

- **Can I bring a sick child to the workplace?**

Children who are unwell are not be brought into the workplace. This increase the risk of transmission to fellow workers. Workers are encouraged to discuss alternative arrangements with their manager, or utilise carer's leave until the child is well.

- **What should I do in regard to planning meetings and gatherings?**

If concerns exist relating to the transmission of communicable diseases (for example, during a pandemic), Managers should consider the need to continue. This includes internal and external events including meetings, training and conferences.

Alternatives in these circumstances may including video-conferencing, postponing travel or relocation to an area with less risk of exposure.

- **What should I do for leave?**

Advice on leave entitlements is available in the Leave Procedure, and on the intranet. Any additional questions can be forwarded to Human Resources.