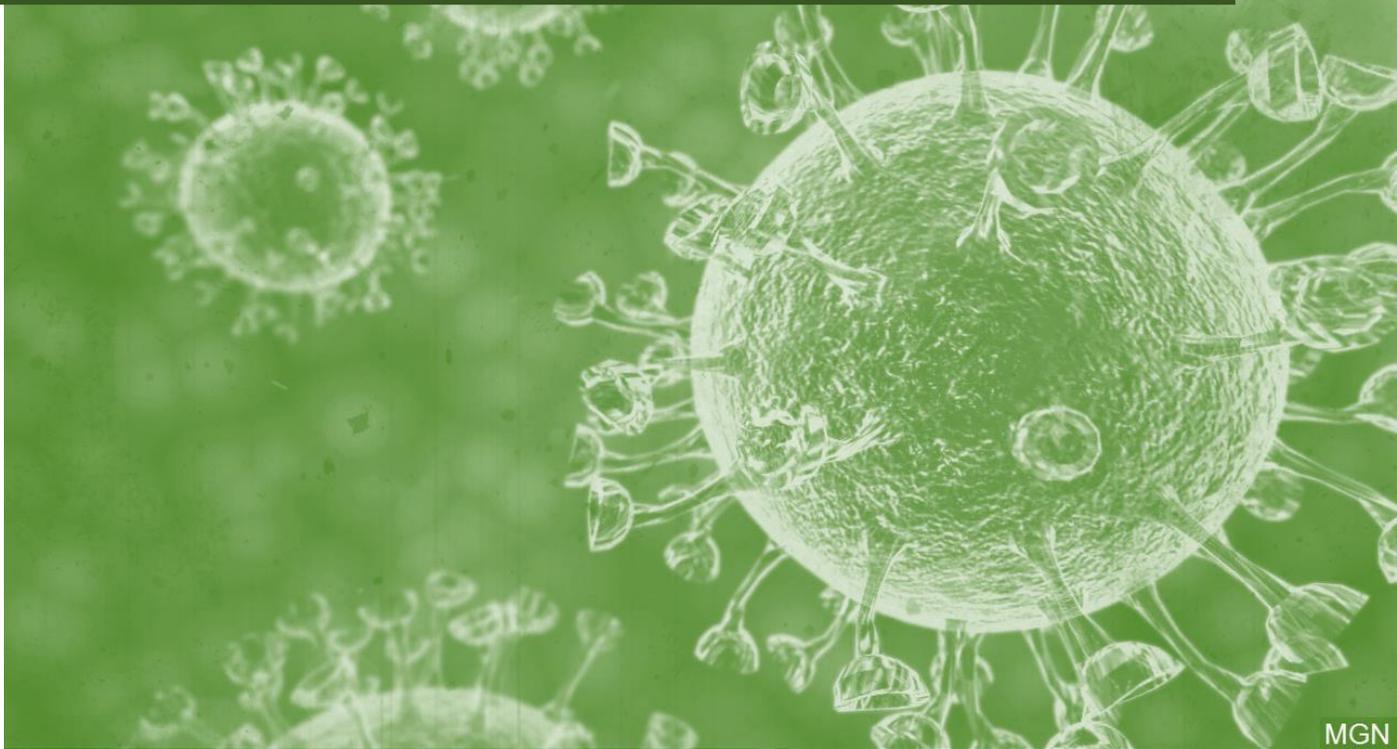




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MINTRAC Meat Processing Industry COVID-19 Employer Guidebook



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COVID-19 MINTRAC Meat Industry Guide

Foreword/overview of COVID-19 in the meat industry

As a result of the events over the last 12 months, there has been a substantial shift in the concern of meat industry employees and the associated risks of their occupation in relation to Covid-19. In July 2020, four Victorian meat processing facilities were linked to almost 300 Covid-19 cases and were deemed to be responsible for having a ‘domino effect’ on the spread of the virus (Bucci, 2020). These outbreaks resulted in meat processing facilities being ranked as the third largest source of Covid-19 cases behind aged care facilities and the education system. This saw the extended shut down of multiple processing plants in southern Victoria and the loss of employment, income and social interaction for many of the industries workers.

What is COVID-19 and why is it a concern to the meat industry?

Covid-19 is a highly infectious virus which can pass between people easily when the correct precautions are not taken. Meat processing is deemed an ‘essential service’ as it provides both Australian and international markets with a large source of food. The meat processing industry is an intensive workplace with most of the facility being set up as a factory meaning that a large number of employees work in a relatively confined space, often facing each other in close proximity when working at benches or on belts. This set up makes these workplaces a high-risk work environment amid this pandemic. Without the adoption of Covid-19 specific protocols and infrastructure, meat industry workers are at high risk of contracting Covid-19 from one another.

What are the major COVID risks in the meat processing industry?

The meat processing industry is a fast-paced factory style work environment which makes it difficult to alter operational processes to adapt to new Covid-19 requirements. It is essential that employers make changes when and where possible to ensure the safety of their workers amid this pandemic. To do so employers need to be able to identify some of the key risks to their workplaces so they can develop management strategies to minimise the chance of a workplace outbreak. Some of the key workplace risks have been identified below:

External people entering the facility

People external to the regular workforce are a source of risk for employers to manage. This may include (but is not limited to) meat inspectors, FSMA employees, vets, engineers, truckdrivers, researchers, owners, and board members. To minimise Covid-19, it is recommended that access and movement of non-essential visitors be minimised if not preventable. To manage and contain risks, the following entry and movement protocols can be considered:

- Declaration forms – a detailed declaration form outlining exposure to or visitation of declared hot spots or risk zones visited within a defined period. This form should be completed for each individual that enters the facility if they are external to the workforce.
- Entry point assessment – upon entering the plant each individual needs to be assessed for signs of Covid-19 including a temperature check.



- Covid-19 Test – In some cases employers may decide that a Covid-19 test is required prior to entry. This may be needed for someone who has visited a potential ‘hot spot’, someone who has declared that they have had Covid-19 like symptoms or someone who will be moving throughout the plant visiting numerous departments at one time.
- Vaccination records – If a company Covid-19 vaccination policy has been developed insure that it is included on declaration forms for site visitors.

Employee engagements outside of work

Once employees leave the workplace, the employer has no control or knowledge over what activities individual employees engage in outside of the workplace. Meat processing facilities are known to be multiculturally diverse workplaces, where employees’ lifestyles differ, and the activities that they undertake can be broad, diverse, and varied. Any type of activity or exposure to people outside of work, can raise the risk of Covid-19 introduction to the workplace. The use of signage and posters can be an effective method of conveying the importance of staying Covid-19 safe outside of the workplace.

- Religious gatherings – employers cannot ask their employees to withhold from their religious practices, however, they can ask that their workers are diligent and careful when attending religious events. This may involve suggesting the wearing of masks, social distancing, reducing physical contact with others and avoiding large social events.
- Classes and workshops – for employees who engage in additional training/education programs outside of work, they may be near people from the greater community. Promoting good Covid-19 practices in and outside of the workplace may reduce the risks of wider community infection transmission.
- Share houses – it is common for employees to live in share house accommodation as it is more affordable particularly for individuals such as young adults or people who have family overseas. Often most members of these houses work together however they may be working across different departments within the meat processing facility. It is important to promote Covid-19 safe personal hygiene practices when workers live in these settings. This can also pose an issue in any instance where a worker is required to quarantine and can often result in the entire household isolating which multiplies the impact of one effected employee.
- Carpooling to work – this is another common practice in meat processing works where employees will carpool to work to save on the costs of running a car. As multiple households may arrive in the one vehicle each day, it is beneficial if employees wear facemasks while in transit if mixed groups from different household travel together.

Inability for social distancing on work floors

Given the layout and structure of meat processing facilities, it is difficult for workers to socially distance themselves whilst working. It is important that employers provide employees with safe work options where social distancing isn’t possible. This includes the implementation of barriers, the use of masks and the encouragement of good Covid-19 safe hygiene practices. The use of posters and signage around the workplace can serve as a



reminder to employees to stay Covid-19 safe and ensure that the risk of the virus spreading throughout the workplace is minimised in the event of an outbreak.

Reduced employee numbers

As a result of Covid-19, a decrease in employee attendance has been witnessed throughout the industry. This is both the result of increased precautions when experiencing Covid-19 like symptoms, isolation period requirements and the reduced number of overseas workers entering Australia. In a survey conducted by MINTRAC in May 2021, 80% of industry stakeholders stated that the biggest impact on employees resulted from forced isolation due to Covid-19 requirements. Additionally, 67% of industry stakeholders indicated that the biggest impact on their workplace was through the loss of employees with 60% of these industry stakeholders reporting that they were experiencing an inability to find replacements for lost employees (Webster, 2021).

Employee isolation management is important for employers to ensure the health and safety of their staff. This may include:

- The implementation of workplace Covid-19 awareness and training options through providing employees with elective training programs to enable them to learn about Covid-19, understand how Covid-19 is spread and how to remain Covid-19 safe. MINTRAC has developed an online portal which houses resources, activities and documentation covering Covid-19 in the workplace and isolation as a result of Covid-19. The site can be accessed at <http://www.mintracwhs.com.au/>
- Providing isolation support – the workforce in many meat processing facilities tends to be an ethnically diverse community. It has been found through research that both people who live in single person households or ethnically diverse households are at greater risk of being negatively impacted by Covid-19 when compared with multi-person households and Australian citizens (Lim, *et al*, 2020). This risk can be attributed to many factors including (but not limited to):
 - Ethnical isolation – people from different cultural backgrounds may not communicate particularly well in English particularly outside of the workplace. This can lead to them not gaining a thorough understanding of the impacts of Covid-19 on their lifestyle through the enforcement of restrictions. This may also result in them feeling further isolation from their peers and networks as communication may also be difficult for them.
 - Emotional impact – many people experience varying degrees of anxiety and depression as a direct result of Covid-19. Emotional impacts can be caused by the feeling of uncertainty, isolation from peers, family and friends and financial related stress.
 - Welfare concerns – another issue many international employees face amid Covid-19 is concern and potentially guilt towards their family and friends in their home countries. Employees may feel guilty for not being able to help or support people overseas in these times. Some may even struggle to contact their loved ones because of the challenges the global the pandemic has caused.

Based on these and other struggles faced by employees, it is important that employers endeavour to make their workplace a healthy, safe, and supportive environment during these



difficult times. Reaching out to employees or providing them with meaningful tasks to provide routine during their time in isolation is one way to aid in maintaining employee mental health. On top of this ensuring that employees have access to the most up to date Covid-19 related information, preferably in multiple languages again provides employees with reassurance and support. Many of these resources can be accessed via the MINTRAC portal at <http://www.mintracwhs.com.au/>.

Protocols to minimise COVID-19 risks in the workplace

Covid-19 impacts wide aspects of a company, from its external service providers to employees and upper management. Covid-19 is forever changing which makes it difficult to develop a single set of guidelines to manage this pandemic within the meat industry. Therefore, guidelines need to provide general guidance for workplaces as well as work area specific guidelines. This handbook includes a workplace risk checklist in Appendix 1.

General facility protocols:

Communication with Employees:

Communication with employees regarding Covid-19 is essential. When communicating with staff members it is important to ensure that effective communication channels are selected and that messages are conveyed clearly. Mixed media forms should be utilised to ensure that all employees can access and understand messages regarding Covid-19. These communication channels can be used to convey messages to employees including Covid-19 updates, prevention methods, vaccine roll out updates, company policy and protocol changes and any other relevant Covid-19 information. Another important consideration when communicating with employees is the use of multilingual resources to provide employees with information in the most effective manner. It has been found through research that culturally diverse communities may experience more issues with their mental wellbeing compared to employees who natively speak English because of feeling linguistically isolated (Rudaizky, 2018). In a survey conducted by MINTRAC in May 2021, it was found that the most commonly spoken languages in facilities surveyed included Mandarin, English, Arabic, Korean and Vietnamese (Webster, 2021).

There are numerous communication channels available through company and personal technology which can be utilised to convey messages. These include (but are not limited to), toolbox talks and group meetings, letters to employees, employee email lists, social media, workplace monitor screens, company text messaging programs, union leaders, signage and posters in the workplace. The types of messages best used with each of these media forms is suggested below:

- Toolbox talks and group meetings – amid Covid-19 these sorts of meetings can be held in a Covid safe manner in the workplace where social distancing is achievable. These types of meetings allow employers to engage with employees providing them with updates of changes to workplace protocol and policies whilst allowing employees to voice their concerns and ask questions directly to employers.
- Letters to employees – mailing letters home or handing them to employees provides employers with a formal communication pathway to discuss changes to the workplace because of Covid-19. This form of communication allows the



employer to convey large quantities of information providing employees with a document to refer to and read through at their own pace.

- Employee email lists – similarly to the letter, this will allow employers to provide employees with large quantities of information easily and can be used to formally engage with employees. This can provide employers the opportunity to share documentation with employees, useful resources and links as well as providing access to online services relevant to employees such as through the MINTRAC portal <http://www.mintracwhs.com.au/>.
- Social media – this is an excellent tool to provide quick updates to employees and can be provided by either the employer themselves, unions or employees on their own personal platforms. One thing to consider prior to using social media as a communication tool, is the demographic of the workforce. If there is a large percentage of older employees or employees who are less technology savvy, then perhaps an alternative communication method would be better suited.
- Signage and Posters in the workplace – this communication tool works in a similar way to social media in that it can be used to grab the attention of workers and provide them with quick updates and reminders. This form of communication serves well for reminders, and can be stationed at entry points, doorways, wash bays and sanitation stations to remind workers of their obligations to ensure the spread of Covid-19 is minimised.
- Workplace monitor – these are commonly located in communal areas such as lunchrooms, changerooms and passageways in the workplace. These monitors can be used to a similar effect as social media, workplace signage and posters where it allows the display of quick important updates to the workforce. These updates can be made appealing through colours and sound which is an excellent tool for capturing employee attention. On top of this, monitor information can be easily updated on a regular basis (even daily during severe Covid-19 outbreaks) and allows the display of relevant video footage making them an excellent communication tool for all demographics within the workforce.
- Company text messaging programs – this channel can allow quick and short information updates to employees prior to entry to the work site. This is an important tool for providing employees with reminders prior to entering work daily. It also works as an engagement tool with employees who are undergoing Covid-19 induced isolation by providing them with workplace updates, isolation timeframe updates and return to work reminders.
- Unions – these bodies provide their own updates with their members however allowing them to interact with employees in the workplace provides employees with an additional source of information and allows them to ask questions that employers may not have the time to answer themselves. These representatives can provide reassurance to employees when time might not permit employers to do so.

Personal Hygiene Requirements:

Covid-19 is spread through particles which are expelled via exhalation, coughing and sneezing. This includes people who are either asymptomatic of Covid-19 themselves, people who are in the early stages of Covid-19 (up to 48 hours prior to showing symptoms) and people who are showing Covid symptoms (World Health Organisation, 2020). Covid can also



be spread via close contact to people with the virus, or through surfaces or high traffic ‘touch point’ areas such as tables, rails and doorhandles that an infected person has come in contact with. It is important that employers provide employees with access to sufficient personal hygiene facilities and PPE in the workplace. Key requirements include (but are not limited to) the following:

Hand washing

It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure that they provide their employees with clean, hygienic and Covid-19 safe hand washing facilities throughout the workplace. These facilities are characterised by access to soap, clean flowing water (hot water is more effective) and hand drying facilities preferably air dryers. If that isn’t an option, paper towel which is easily dispensed without ‘touch points’ on the dispenser is a suitable solution. Appropriate hand washing protocol signage should be displayed within these facilities to ensure that employees understand the importance of thorough hand washing protocol.

Sanitisation Stations

Where hand washing stations are not available employers should provide employees with access to sanitation stations. This is commonly the case in high ‘touch points’ around the workplace such as gatehouses/security huts where staff enter the plant, door handles, handrails, tea rooms and change rooms. It is more effective when sanitation stations contain automated sanitiser dispensers to avoid people touching the same point as their co-workers. It is also important to place highly visible signage around key touch points as a reminder to employees.

PPE

Covid-19 has seen an influx of additional PPE requirements in meat processing facilities on top of the safety equipment regularly worn by employees. It is important to ensure that all employees correctly wear the additional PPE to ensure its effectiveness in preventing Covid-19 outbreaks within the workplace. Required Covid-19 PPE includes:

- Face masks or coverings – given that the most common spread of Covid-19 occurs via droplets from an infected persons breath and/or coughs/sneezes it is important to ensure that all workers on the chain are wearing facemasks or face coverings correctly. This involves the covering being worn across both the nose and the mouth to ensure all droplets are captured. If a mask is worn it is important that the mask fits firmly around the mouth, cheeks and chin, while face coverings need to extend past their chin and jawline. Refer to the images below:

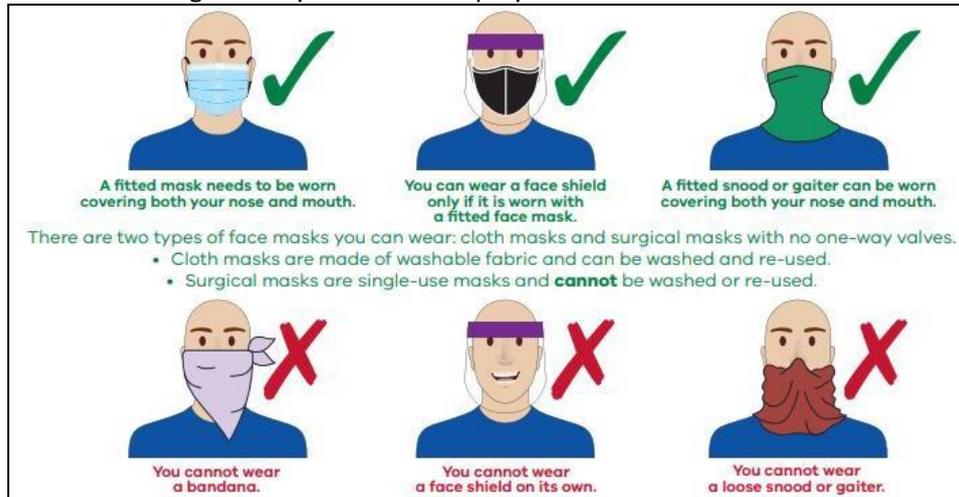


Image source: (Victorian State Government, 2021)

Economically, the use of cloth balaclavas may suit the workplace more effectively however it is essential that when providing employees with face coverings that they still wear coverings to and from work (such as in ride shares or while walking to and from work) and while elsewhere on work grounds to reduce the likelihood of exposure to Covid-19. It is important that items worn as Covid face coverings are both functional (well maintained and not damaged) and clean (should be cleaned upon removal, do not exceed the masks effective period).

If employees are allowed to bring and wear their own face coverings in the workplace, ensure the above standards and that both their noses and mouths are covered. All masks have a ‘lifespan’ on them which means that after their effective period has been exceeded, they should be replaced with a new mask. This lifespan is usually 2-6 hours depending on the material used (this includes single use masks) and type of mask, for maximum effectiveness ensure that employees replace or clean their personal masks daily at a minimum (CEBM, 2020).

Note that for the best protection it is recommended that masks and face coverings with a minimum of three layers be worn (NSW Government, 2021).

Social distancing:

Maintaining social distancing in the workplace can be difficult especially in production settings. However, there are options to ensure that employees are kept safe both on the chain and around the workplace.

- **On chain social distancing** – social distancing is difficult on the chain as it is a compact, fast paced work environment, however, for the safety of employees it is important that social distancing options are provided in the workplace.
 - Belts, benches, and chains – when employees are working at a set pace on the belts, at benches or on the chain a distance of 1.5m needs to be maintained wherever possible. In workspaces where this is not possible barriers can be introduced between workers to minimise the risk of contact.

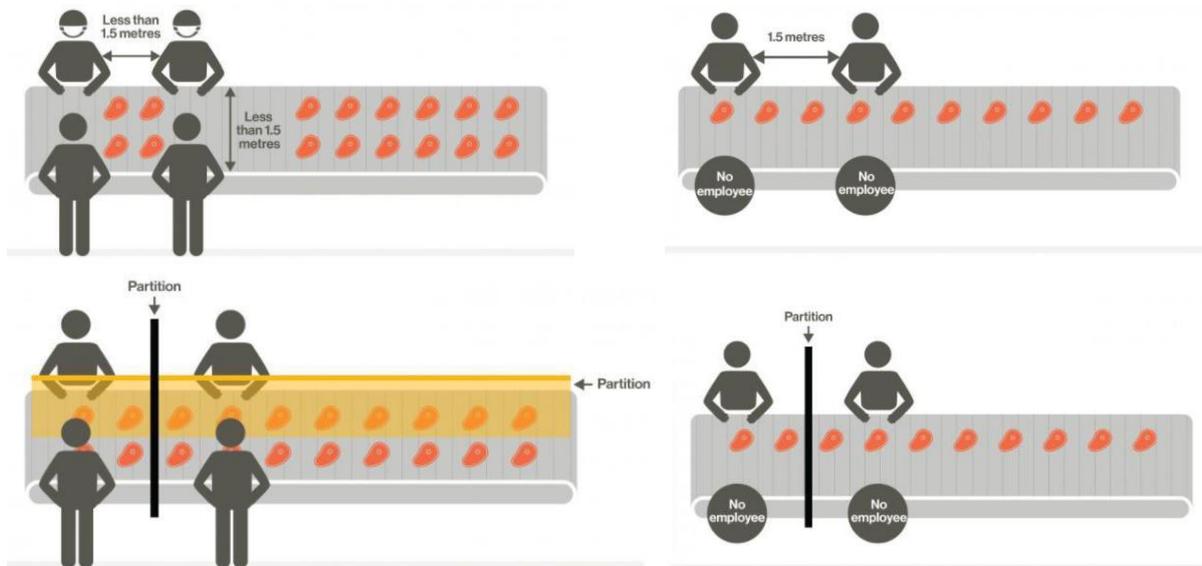


Image sourced: NSW Government, 2020.

- 'Mobile' workers – workers who have roles which involve them moving among other workers, across floors or between departments become a contamination risk to the workplace. Where possible reduce their movements within the workplace. If this is not possible then ensure that these workers maintain a 1.5m distance from all other 'stationary' workers at all times.
- **General workplace social distancing** – in common workplaces workers from numerous areas typically mingle and cross paths which makes it difficult to reduce the spread of Covid-19 when an outbreak occurs. Below are some preventative protocols for consideration:
 - Gatehouses and security huts – this is the point that all employees, contractors and visitors to the site pass through. A barrier may need to be implemented to ensure that social distancing requirements are met between the gatehouse and entering personnel. Additionally, ground markers may be used to ensure social distancing between entering personnel during peak entry times.
 - Management and office workers – it is important that office workers maintain social distancing within their workspaces. This is especially important for office workers who move throughout the plant and interact with other workers.
 - Common workplace areas – it is essential that social distancing is maintained in common areas throughout the workplace. These areas include (but is not limited to) laundry facilities, canteens/lunchrooms and changerooms/bathrooms. In places that involve queuing (such as canteen lines, bathrooms and laundry lines) the ground should be clearly marked to encourage social distancing in these areas. It is also recommended that signage be placed around these areas as a reminder to workers. In lunchrooms which are often crowded locations in processing facilities, it is important that social distancing is maintained. This can be achieved through a few different methods:



- ❖ Firstly, stagger break times for different departments, when possible, to reduce numbers in the room at one time.
- ❖ Secondly, place alternative facilities on the worksite to reduce overcrowding. This might include marques or temporary removable buildings. Again, separate departments or groups of workers entering to reduce interactions between workers from different areas.
- ❖ Finally, clearly mark social distancing requirements on tables and benches. If possible, replace long benches with individual chairs to further promote social distancing. Place signage around these areas as a reminder to workers.

Cleaning and sanitising:

As a result of Covid-19, increased cleaning and sanitisation practices have been implemented in plants to ensure that high risk ‘touch point’ areas are maintained to minimise the risk of Covid-19 spreading throughout the workplace. As well as this, high traffic areas also need to be maintained to reduce infection risk to the workforce. Some solutions to cleaning requirements are listed below:

- Touch points – ensure that surfaces that are touched regularly by multiple staff are cleaned after every individual department break. This includes (but is not limited to) handrails, doorhandles, toilet locks, toilet flushes, bins (including sanitary bins in female bathrooms), fridge/oven handles, tables, seats and benches (including in changerooms) taps and wash hoses in wash bays. The best cleaning practice is through the use of a disinfectant spray then wiping the surface dry.
- High traffic areas – make sure that areas where many people pass through are cleaned thoroughly at least once a day or after an influx of use. These areas may include, changerooms, laundry points, lunchrooms, gatehouses/security huts and smoking pads. Best practice includes cleaning all touch points and furniture surfaces with a disinfectant spray and wiping the surface dry (SafeWork Australia, 2021).
- Workspaces – general cleaning protocol typically provides good practice for disinfection. If a contamination point arises during the workday the area should be thoroughly disinfected with food grade product disinfectant before production recommences.

Management of personnel on site:

It is important that all people both employees and others entering the site are managed with care. Protocol and entry standards need to be implemented to ensure that no potential Covid-19 cases enter the workplace. Strict employee and visitor movement records need to be kept enabling tracing of direct contacts with infectious employees. This will enable identification and notification of affected personnel in a timely manner. Some examples of management methods to minimise Covid-19 cases in the workplace are outlined below:

- **Sign in and out** – Upon entry to the site and exiting, all people need to check into (and out of) the premises. This can be achieved using QR codes or sign in forms at all entry points to the plant.



- **Declaration forms** – for employees who have had time off work or have been in isolation, declaration forms should be completed to determine whether they have travelled recently, the locations they have visited, people they have come in contact with and if they have had any Covid-19 symptoms. Visitors entering the site should also be required to complete a declaration form to determine the above-mentioned details prior to granting entry to the site.
- **Testing** – prior to granting entry to a visitor, particularly those travelling from locations other than the town in which the premises is located, testing may provide the most secure form of Covid-19 management. If the employer is concerned about the responses of an individual's declaration form, employers may ask visitors to get a Covid-19 test prior to entry. Plant access should be based on the provision of a negative test result in these situations.

Individual responsibility:

Both in the workplace and outside of the workplace it is important that employees follow covid safe guidelines thoroughly. Employers should emphasis this within the workplace using communication tools to ensure that there are minimal chances of Covid-19 entering the workplace. Three of the key areas that employees need to be well educated about their requirements and responsibilities include the use of PPE, personal hygiene expectations and illness/testing requirements. Employers can use multiple media forms in various languages to explain the importance of these measures to their employees.

- **PPE** – personal protective equipment includes masks/face coverings, gloves and protective clothing. It is recommended that employees and visitors adhere to these PPE requirements within the workplace. All employees should be expected to wear masks and face coverings in the workplace as well as protective clothing, or workplace provided clothing rather than their own clothing. Upon entry to the workplace, visitors may be issued with a set off PPE to ensure that they have everything required of them. This may include coverall clothing, masks and gloves.
- **Personal hygiene** – it is expected that people working within the food production industry always maintain a high level of personal hygiene. Good personal hygiene practices that can reduce the risk of Covid-19 spread include (but are not limited to):
 - **Hand washing and use of sanitation stations** – it is important that employees regularly wash and/or sanitise their hands prior to handling any product/packaging, after coughing or sneezing, after touching their faces, whenever they come in contact with touch points (eg. Door handles, handrails, kitchen implements – fridges, taps, ovens and bathroom fixtures). Reminders of maintaining good personal hygiene can be placed around the workplace in multiple media forms such as signs, posters, on monitors and in work notifications.
 - **Coughing and sneezing protocol** – coughing and sneezing can be unavoidable and doesn't have to be a direct result of illness as it may be triggered by allergies etc, however it is important to ensure that employees are careful of personal hygiene requirements. Ensure that employees cough/sneeze



away from product and co-workers, then wash or sanitise their hands thoroughly to remove any germs.

- **Touching face/hands** – A downside to wearing masks in the workplace is that they may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for employees which in turn will result in them touching their masks and faces more than normal. It is important that employees understand that by touching their masks and faces they may still be able to pass on Covid-19 if they touch surfaces and equipment without washing or sanitising their hands. Additionally, a common issue within factory settings where PPE includes the need to wear protective glasses, workers will/may have to wipe and ‘defog’ their eyewear resulting from moisture build up due to wearing a mask. Whenever an employee touches their eyewear, it is important that they wash or sanitise their hands prior to returning to work.
- **Mask hygiene** – Most masks have a use time of 2 to 6 hours (CEBM, 2020). It is important to ensure that employees change their face masks or mask filters whenever necessary. This includes regularly washing masks if they are reusable, this should be done daily.
- **Illness/Testing** – It is important that as additional symptoms of Covid-19 are identified that employers ensure that their employees are aware of them. This can be done through numerous information pathways in the workplace. Additionally, employers should ensure that employees are aware of the correct procedures for reporting illnesses to the workplace. A system should be set up to ensure that employees do not enter the workplace if they suspect that they have Covid-19 with a simple method in place for them to report their absence to work. This may include reporting via the workplace website, email or over the phone. The pathways of communication need to be clear and concise for employees to follow. When in isolation awaiting test results it is important that the employer touches base with employees to ensure that they are aware of the return-to-work protocol, WorkSafe Victoria have developed some excellent resources for return-to-work protocol which can be accessed at <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/return-to-work>.

Key Covid-19 risks by department:

Stockmen

Workers within lairage facilities tend to operate in open outdoor settings minimising their exposure risks significantly. In certain roles where workers are within close proximity to one another such as pushing animals into the knocking box then masks should be worn.

An external risk to stockmen is the entry of truck drivers to the facility. Protocol should be put in place to minimise the interactions between truck drivers and workers including the exchange of any necessary paperwork. Masks or face coverings should be worn during any interactions.

Slaughter Floor

The slaughter floor is an intensive work environment where employees are usually unable to social distance whilst performing their work duties. It is important that all employees



wear masks or face coverings whilst working. In positions where it is possible staff should be a minimum of 1.5 metres away from one another. In positions where this isn't possible the implementation of plastic barriers may be implemented to enable social distancing if practical considering floor layout.

Staff movement throughout the workspace should be reduced to essential movement only, as long as it doesn't compromise the quality of work being performed.

By Products

By-product areas include (but are not limited to) hide sheds, render facilities, offal processing and waste product management. Depending upon the nature of the role will determine the Covid-19 requirements for the department. Indoor work roles such as offal processing should always include the wearing of face coverings, social distancing from each other where possible and in situations where workers are positioned in close quarters, the use of barriers can be considered.

Shed-ed workplaces such as hide processing and render facilities usually allow workers to socially distance from one another more easily. Workers in these areas should still wear masks or face coverings however the type of covering should be carefully considered as loose flowy fabric (in some styles of balaclavas) may pose a WHS risk to employees in certain roles closely located to moving machinery. For outdoor workers it is recommended that they still wear a mask or face covering while working however if they are working in isolation from other employees this may not be necessary.

Boning Room

The boning room is the most intense and highly populated area in most processing facilities. Employees work in close proximity to other workers and the nature of this workspace makes social distancing nearly impossible. Therefore, it is essential that other measures are implemented within this department to manage and mitigate COVID19 risks in some capacity. This includes the implementation of barriers wherever possible (particularly in areas where workers are facing one another in close proximity), reducing shared workspaces and mandatory mask wearing.

Packaging

This department similarly to the boning room tends to be an intense and highly populated area on the chain, however one difference here is that there are often multiple people moving about different packing zones with numerous touch points and shared workspaces. It is important to reduce the movement of workers between these areas and to ensure that social distancing is in place where possible. When social distancing is not possible, barriers should be considered in situations where workers are facing one another, and mask/face coverings should be mandatory.

In final point packing areas such as Cold Stores and Warehouses, similar issues are encountered. Multiple staff tend to move throughout the workspace with shared tools, equipment, and surfaces. It is important to minimise the chances of employees coming in contact with contamination points from other employees. It should also be noted that although social distancing is easier to maintain in larger workspaces such as warehouse



and cold store settings, employees should still be required to wear masks/face coverings whenever there is a Covid-19 risk to the workplace.

Admin/Office

As require in all office style settings social distancing should be maintained. Where this is not possible workers who can work from home should do so or barriers should be implemented. Masks/Face coverings should be always worn by all employees unless consuming food or drink at their desk. Communal areas such as tea rooms and bathroom facilities should be cleaned regularly, including the cleaning of major touch points should such as door handles, surfaces, machine buttons, phones etc.

Canteen/Laundry/Stores

The main concern with these facilities is they are typically high traffic zones which involve a lot of people queuing and passing through the area. It is important that extra safety precautions be taken within these areas as employees from all departments utilise these services. These extra safety precautions can be considered in addition to the previously discussed precautions of wearing masks/face coverings, implementing social distancing, and installing barriers. Extra safety precautions in these areas include:

- **Strict cleaning protocol** – ensure that surfaces are regularly cleaned either between breaks in lunchrooms or between rushes in stores/laundries
- **Sanitation stations** – set up sanitation stations at queue entries to promote hand cleaning for employees prior to serving them
- **Marked queue lines** – ensure that social distancing markers are placed on the floor to remind employees to socially distance when queuing
- **Additional PPE** – servers should wear additional PPE such as gloves when handling orders and money or if they will be coming in regular contact with other workers

Clinic/Health

The clinic or health centre facilities in plant are another potentially hazardous area within the workplace as access is available to all employees who may require medical attention. It is important to know who enters and exits this area, so consideration may be given to a ‘sign in’ sheet at the entry point along with a sanitation station outside of the entry door to promote good hand hygiene upon entry. On top of this all staff should always wear masks/face coverings, and gloves whenever they are assisting patients.

Maintenance

Maintenance staff tend to perform duties which require them to work across all departments within the facility. It is important that these maintenance staff minimise their contact with members of the workforce in each department. These staff members should always wear a mask and when possible, adhere to social distancing guidelines and protocols.

Cleaning

Cleaning crew protocols are essential. It is important that the crew themselves remain safe using sufficient PPE. Even on boarding additional cleaners to ensure that cleaning of



common areas, high traffic zones and key touch points are regularly done or utilise staff who are on light duties as a result of workplace (or other) injuries as they are not demanding tasks. The workers should be provided with the additional PPE of gloves as they will be in close contact with potentially contaminated surfaces.

Contractors

Some contractors are essential to the daily processing of carcasses such as meat inspectors, vets and department representatives. Additional contractors such as builders and trades men should be reduced to minimal numbers where possible. For contractors attending the workplace daily, they should be treated as regular employees who sign in/out of the facility and undergo temperature checks upon entry. It is also important to ensure that these workers have access to or are supplied with sufficient PPE to ensure they are not a risk to other employees throughout the workspace in which they operate. Contractors should comply with safe work protocols and instructions as required by all staff. It is advisable to minimise the number of contractors where possible entering workspaces to minimise contact between the workforces.

Security/Gatehouse

The entry point to the processing facility is a critical point of protection for the plant. A daily screening process needs to be implemented at this point where employees are temperature checked and quickly observed for signs of illness prior to entering the site. These procedures can be conducted by security/gatehouse personnel. Due to their high exposure risk to employees both inside and outside of the facility, security/gatehouse personnel need to be provided with sufficient PPE including masks/face coverings, protective barriers and gloves as well as being provided with access to a sanitation station to ensure their personal safety and wellbeing.

Visitors

It is recommended that non-essential visitors are minimised or completely removed from the workplace at times of high risk. Meetings and audits should be postponed or rescheduled to ensure the safety of the workforce. On the occasion that a visitor must attend the premises during these times it is recommended they undergo an evaluation process prior to being permitted entry through the use of declaration forms. Upon entry they should be screened again (temperature checked) and provided with sufficient PPE to ensure the safety of employees within the facility. It should be emphasised that visitors may not come in contact with employees and must maintain 1.5 metres of social distancing at all times.

Value Add

Value add facilities such as product development and cooking facilities on plant operate similarly to other indoor departments. Often there are many workers operating within close proximity to one another with a lot of movement around the floor. It is important to ensure that everybody has access to sufficient PPE including masks/face covers and that excess movements are minimised. Surfaces where numerous people touch and work from should be sanitised to avoid contamination.



COVID Isolation management

Despite employees not being present on the work site it is important to encourage their safety outside of work during these uncertain times. As mentioned before, it has been found that many meat workers fall into the demographic of people who can be most heavily impacted by Covid-19 for numerous reasons (including but not limited to) they often inhabit single person households, language and cultural barriers, feeling helpless towards friends and family overseas as well as general isolation from friends and family ((Lim, *et al*, 2020), (Marozzi, 2020), (Rudaizky, 2018), (Miletic, 2020)). On top of this meat processing employees can also be more likely to engage in alcohol and substance abuse outside of work, may be heavy smokers, may suffer from mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety and may even be involved in domestic violence or violent crimes outside of the workplace ((MacNair, 2002), (Gibson, 2016), (Shepherd, 2013), (Khara, 2020)).

Based on the above it is very important to maintain contact with workers during isolation periods. There are numerous ways in which this can be achieved. These include (but are not limited to):

- **Check ins** – sending a daily text message or reminder email to check in with employees containing links to useful online resources such as helplines or self help guides provides them with an easy to access resource to ensure their mental and physical wellbeing. This can also be used to provide employees with return-to-work reminders and information on changing Covid conditions.
- **Chat groups** – in the event of an entire facility being subjected to a shut down, online chat groups can be established to promote communication between the workforce and employers.
- **Upskilling opportunities** – in some situations employees may be eligible to undergo training while in isolation. There are various online courses which are both free and chargeable which will allow employees to remain engaged whilst in isolation and ensure their ongoing learning. These resources include (but are not limited to), knife care, WHS, Covid safety, injury prevention, mindfulness, and role specific tasks. Many of these can be accessed through the MINTRAC WHS Gateway at <http://www.mintracwhs.com.au/>.
- **Knowledge reinforcement** – In addition to upskilling opportunities, time in isolation may be used to have employees read relevant in-house documents and complete training requirements regarding changes in protocol as reflected in SOPs and work instructions.
- **Return to work preparation** – this could involve reminding staff to have any documentation ready for their return to work (such as doctors' certificates, test results etc) and have their tools in good condition to do so (such as knives sharpened, and PPE cleaned). This may also take into consideration their personal wellbeing such as maintaining daily routine in the lead up to returning to work.



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Appendix 1: Workplace COVID-19 Risk Assessment Checklist:

| Task | Persons Impacted | Methods In Place | Action Items | Additional Comments |
|---|-------------------|------------------|---|--------------------------|
| EXAMPLE TASK | BONING ROOM STAFF | (Y/N) | Place signage in the entries and wash bays. | Update outdated posters. |
| General Management Protocol: | | | | |
| Communication with employees in the workplace | | (Y/N) | Eg. Toolbox talk, monitor screens etc. | |
| Communication with employees outside of the workplace | | (Y/N) | Eg. Emails, SMS, Social Media etc. | |
| Personal Hygiene Protocol: | | | | |
| Hand Washing | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Videos on Monitors etc. | |
| Sanitation Stations | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation etc. | |
| PPE Regulating | | (Y/N) | Eg. Appropriate masks, Visors, Gloves etc. | |
| Coughing and Sneezing Signage | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Videos on Monitors etc. | |
| Illness and Testing Signage | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Hotlines, etc. | |



| | | | | |
|---|--|--------------|--|--|
| Mask Hygiene Signage | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Videos on Monitors etc. | |
| Social Distancing | | | | |
| Social Distancing on the Chain | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Social Distancing at Workplace Entry (Gatehouse) | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Social Distancing in Common Areas | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Social Distancing in Offices | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Additional Cleaning and Sanitising | | | | |
| Touch Point Cleaning | | (Y/N) | Eg. Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| High Traffic Zones | | (Y/N) | Eg. Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Communal Workspaces | | (Y/N) | Eg. Implementation, Cleaning etc. | |
| Movement of People On/Off Site | | | | |
| Contract Tracing Sign In/Out | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation etc. | |



| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Declaration Forms | | (Y/N) | Eg. Implementation, Updating etc. | |
| Testing Requirements | | (Y/N) | Eg. Implementation, Updating etc. | |
| Covid-19 Isolation Plan | | | | |
| Communication and Check Ins | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Advertising etc. | |
| Return to Work Protocol | | (Y/N) | Eg. Signage, Implementation, Advertising etc. | |
| COVID-19 Risk Assessment by Workspace | | | | |
| <u>Department</u> | <u>Risk Considerations</u> | <u>Managed</u> | <u>Identified Risks</u> | <u>Action Items</u> |
| Stockyards/ Lairage | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Truck Drivers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Gates and latches etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Slaughter Floor | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Auditors etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Machinery etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. AAOs etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Machinery etc. | |



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|--|--|--------------|---------------------------|--|
| By-Products (Offal, Hides Etc.) | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| | | | | |
| Boning Room | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Auditors etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Machinery etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Packaging and Warehouses | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Supervisors etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Forklifts etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Gloves etc. | |
| Administration and Office | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Visitors etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Desks etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Canteen/Kiosk | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Tables etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Gloves for money etc. | |
| Laundry | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Windows etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Gloves etc. | |



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|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--|
| Store | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Windows etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Gloves etc. | |
| Clinics/Health | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Door Handles etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Maintenance | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Machinery etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Cleaners | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Door Handles etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Contractors | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Managers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Equipment etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Workers etc. | |
| | | | Eg. Desks etc. | |



| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--|
| Gatehouse and Security Staff | Touch Points | (Y/N) | | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Barriers etc. | |
| On Site Visitors | People Coming in Contact With | (Y/N) | Eg. Managers etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Surfaces etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |
| Value-Add Departments | People Entering the Workspace | (Y/N) | Eg. Auditors etc. | |
| | Touch Points | (Y/N) | Eg. Machinery etc. | |
| | PPE Requirements | (Y/N) | Eg. Masks etc. | |