

WORKING FROM HOME - GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic there are very clear directions from Government that “if you can work from home you must work from home”. Most employers are accommodating this where possible. There are however occupational health and safety (OHS) considerations when working from home (WFH), particularly in the COVID-19 context.

Obligations under the OHS Act don’t change because your work location has shifted.

Some of the OHS considerations for you and your employer are:

- Minimising the spread of COVID-19
- Who has duty of care?
- Working from home
- Home office environment
- Workstation set up
- Keeping in touch
- Mental and emotional wellbeing

Employers should put mechanisms in place that guard against isolation, promote social interaction with colleagues, ensure that online fatigue is managed and install effective and responsive communication systems within and across teams. They should also ensure that any at risk circumstances are identified and addressed, such as family violence.

More information on family violence and seeking safety during covid-19 can be found at www.safesteps.org.au/understanding-family-violence/seeking-safety-during-covid-19/

Risk identification and management applies to physical and practical risks, as well as psychological and emotional wellbeing. An assessment of WFH space should include ergonomics, identifying exits, lighting, electrical configuration, thermal control and ventilation, dimensions and space.

Given that official guidance is to work from home where possible, and your employer’s obligations to provide and maintain a safe workplace has not changed, equipment needs to establish a safe home office space remains an employer responsibility.

The exact implications of this will depend on the type of work being done, what you already have at home and what’s reasonable in the circumstances, but could include measures such as temporarily using work tools and equipment at home, such as chairs, computer monitors or headsets.

Some tips on staying safe whilst working from home:

- Recognise that both you and your employer have obligations under the OHS Act to be safe at home.
- The impact of performing work in the pandemic causes all types of pressures and demands, alert your employer if this starts impacting you.
- Put routines in place that support healthy work practices: take breaks, work your allotted hours, have regular start and finishing times and take your leave when due.
- Employers need to put in place scheduled and consistent supervision sessions. They should also maintain continued access to EAP.

Being safe at work is everyone’s responsibility, send this fact sheet to your colleagues and encourage discussion around safe work practices at your organisation.

Worksafe Victoria has a resource on OHS, WFH and minimising spread of Corona: www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/minimising-spread-coronavirus-covid-19-working-home

ATO Info on claiming WFH expenses during COVID-19 pandemic: www.ato.gov.au/General/COVID-19/Support-for-individuals-and-employees/Employees-working-from-home/

For further information please contact:

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