

Commuting and accommodating seasonal/contract workers during coronavirus (COVID-19)

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of the agricultural sector and are committed to providing support during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

SLOWING THE SPREAD

To slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), it is vital the whole supply chain adopts enhanced cleaning regimes, hygiene practices and physical distancing measures.

Workers in the agricultural sector should maintain a distance of at least 1.5 metres from other people wherever possible. In enclosed spaces, there should be a minimum of four square metres of available floorspace per person. This includes all sheds, offices, warehouses or other commercial premises.

Cleaning requirements and hygiene practices should be strictly adhered to and communicated clearly to all workers. Advice is available at www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au

Employing seasonal workers

Seasonal workers are an important part of Victorian agriculture. The below information helps those businesses or employers who rely on a larger and more mobile workforce.

Commuting to, from and around work

Carrying passengers in a car should be avoided, unless they live together in a household. Cars represent an enclosed space where there may be a heightened risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Travelling as a passenger in a car, or carrying multiple passengers is strongly discouraged.

Where workers are from different households and must travel together, they should try to achieve physical distancing requirements while commuting to and around the worksite. Try to maintain at least 1.5 metres (approximately two arms-lengths) between passengers during transportation. If commuting by bus, minibus or van, passengers should keep at least one vacant seat in all directions, separating them from other passengers.

Wherever possible vehicles should have as much fresh air circulation by adjusting air conditioning or opening windows and allowing air circulation between trips by leaving windows down. The inside of vehicles should be regularly cleaned, and surfaces disinfected – paying particular attention to frequently touched surfaces. Information on cleaning and disinfection principles for coronavirus (COVID-19) is available at dhhs.vic.gov.au/cleaning-and-disinfecting-reduce-covid-19-transmission.

If any workers are unwell, even with mild cold and flu like symptoms, they should not be allowed in the vehicle and should isolate themselves at home. If the unwell person is not at home, use a private car driven by the person or an existing close contact to travel home and self-isolate.

If you suspect you or one of your workers may have coronavirus (COVID-19) call the dedicated DHHS hotline on 1800 675 398.

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only.

Accommodating workers

Some employers and labour hire companies are responsible for providing accommodation for agricultural workers.

Accommodation should ideally be provided on-farm and must be of a standard to allow for appropriate hygiene and physical distancing practices. Employers responsible for worker accommodation must also have arrangements in place to enable workers to meet self-isolation requirements if needed.

The premises should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the workers arrive, after they leave, and as regularly as possible during their stay.

Employers must comply with any local government requirements regarding the provision of on-site accommodation.

Should on-site accommodation be unavailable, employers may explore the use of self-contained accommodation facilities (e.g. motel rooms with bathroom, individual cabins, etc.) to accommodate workers as close to their worksite as possible.

Camping grounds and caravan parks are not permitted to remain open because of the communal nature of many of the facilities offered (dhhs.vic.gov.au/restricted-activity-directions). Exceptions include where the occupants:

- live there permanently
- are without another permanent place of residence
- have travelled to Victoria for work
- were already staying there temporarily at the time the restrictions came into force and are unable to return to a permanent place of residence.

To reduce the risk of transmission between groups, workers who operate in teams should be accommodated and commute to/from work within the same group as far as practicable.

Example scenarios

- 1. Farmer Alex has multiple seasonal workers who share the same house, which is provided by him. In addition to work undertaken on Alex's farm, workers will be sub-contracted to other farms throughout the season. Alex will hire a driver to transport the workers to other locations.**

Since the workers are living together, they are classified a household.

Alex should, however, encourage the driver, who is not from the same household, to maintain a minimum of 1.5 metres from the passengers at all times as per the physical distancing requirement.

When moving to another farm site, ideally the same work team should remain together, and arrangements should be in place to ensure the team can maintain physical distancing from other workers.

- 2. Farmer Stefan has fruit orchards and advertises for backpackers and seasonal workers. He typically picks up the workers from various locations in town himself and drives them back to his farm.**

As the workers are not from the same household, all occupants in the vehicle should maintain 1.5 metres, as per the physical distancing requirement. In order to manage this, Stefan should hire additional vehicles with dedicated drivers. Smaller teams will travel together in a seating configuration that ensures physical distancing is maintained.

3. Farm manager Kris generally carools to work in a small passenger vehicle with four other workers, who live in separate houses in town.

Travelling as a passenger in a car, or carrying multiple passengers is strongly discouraged. It is recommended the workers separate into separate vehicles if possible. If this is not possible, then the workers should try to maintain the 1.5 metre physical distance between each worker by using as many vehicles as available or by using a larger vehicle.

4. Olivia runs a contract shearing team who move from farm to farm over the shearing season. Normally the team travels in two vans and camp on-site with communal kitchen, shower and toilet facilities.

Olivia should ensure an increased cleaning regime of the vans and communal facilities following the guidance at available at [dhhs.vic.gov.au/cleaning-and-disinfecting-reduce-covid-19-transmission](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cleaning-and-disinfecting-reduce-covid-19-transmission). Olivia may need to review accommodation standards and have a plan in place to enable workers within her team to meet self-isolation requirements if needed. When moving to another site, Olivia will need to review the accommodation arrangements with each new farm prior to arrival to ensure she can maintain physical distancing requirements.

Industry support

Employers can access support to source workers through the Working for Victoria program. Through this program, workers can be provided with support to commute or to relocate to their new place of work.

For more information about accessing support through the Working for Victoria, visit [vic.gov.au/workingforvictoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/workingforvictoria)

For the most up-to-date information on the Victorian Government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19), visit www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au

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