

COVID-19

Employer guide

Working *from home*

Support for your employees





To help slow the spread of COVID-19, more Australian businesses now have many of their employees working from home. Legislation requires employers to limit risks to employees' health and safety at work.

Because the risk of contracting or transmitting COVID-19 at work, or when travelling to and from work, cannot be eliminated, working from home, where it is possible and safe, minimises that risk.

Everyone's situation will differ. Some may have worked from home before and be partially set up. For some it may be new. Check your company's intranet for information or call your manager.

Getting started

To work from home efficiently your manager should clarify what your role will be so you can gather the tools to accomplish it. If this process is new for both of you, be patient. The rapid outbreak of COVID-19 has accelerated the transition to remote working arrangements for many people: you are not alone.

Step 1 Get set up

It may be tempting to get stuck in straight away. But working on a laptop in a cramped position, such as the couch or a dining table, may cause injuries longer term. Pause and take the time to set up an ergonomic workspace in the most distraction-free zone in your home. Aspects to consider are:

- **adequate lighting and ventilation**
- **an adjustable chair with back support**
- **an uncluttered desk with everything you need in easy reach**
- **placing your monitor at eye level (try hard back books)**
- **using accessories such as a keyboard, mouse, wrist-pad, headset, webcam and footrest.**

Step 2 Get connected

A reliable home internet connection is, in a lot of cases, essential. Some Australian telecommunications companies are currently offering free broadband data upgrades. For security reasons, you may need to access your company's system using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) - ask your IT department for instructions on how to gain entry.

Your business may already be using teamwork tools and apps to work together online. Google Docs, Zoom, Slack, Skype and Dropbox are some of these technologies. If you are not confident using them, ask your manager for a 'get started' session. You could also search for an online orientation or ask a colleague to help. Similarly, if you are experienced in a specific app, you can offer to help others.

While most of these tools require internet access, avoid overload on COVID-19 news. It may cause anxiety that is harder to shake if you are home alone.

Step 3 Get a routine

Your manager should establish a routine for staying in touch and keeping on track. This is crucial now that you are working remotely. It may be a morning meeting to set daily goals and a shorter afternoon catch-up to track what's been achieved. For at least one of these meetings, a video chat is ideal.

Establishing a personal routine is important too. Try to mimic your regular work schedule, prioritise tasks and take regular breaks. If you are struggling to be productive, tools such as Freedom switch off the internet for planned periods of time, and methods such as the Pomodoro Technique, whereby you break work down into intervals, help you to focus in short bursts.

Finish your day at a fixed time and shut down your computer. Covering your workspace with a sarong or throw may help you to mentally switch off if it's in a common area. The goal is to avoid burnout and to leave your work behind - at least in a physical sense - when the day is done, or whenever your allocated shift ends.

Step 4 Get communicating

Feeling isolated or out of the loop will impact you professionally and personally. Both you and your manager should avoid it happening; though be aware that it can be a gradual drift. When you are working on site, your manager and co-workers can see if something is worrying you or not working out. In a remote setting, these visual cues are gone, so don't be afraid to reach out to colleagues more.

Stay connected to broader company communications or do 1:1 virtual 'huddles' with other employees. Simple regular phone calls can help too. The TEDx YouTube channel features some inspiring talks about remote working; if a particular talk resonates for your industry or team, summarise its key points and share it with colleagues.

If you live with other people, communicate with them too, and try to set expectations such as a 'closed door policy' during work hours. Young children or other carer responsibilities may make working from home a challenge, but spending time together over lunch or dinner can help - and remember the positives of how much time you're saving by not having to commute. Also, avoid working in spaces where family members are asleep - and get ample sleep yourself.

Step 5 Get active

Regular exercise will improve your mood and your health. The Australian Government has introduced self-quarantine rules for people at higher risk of transmitting COVID-19 (health.gov.au). If you fit these criteria but are otherwise feeling well, you can exercise in your garden or courtyard without a mask. If you live in an apartment, you must do so with a mask.

If you are in self-quarantine, search online for home-workout sessions. If you are not in self-quarantine you can exercise outdoors. If you attend a gym, ask about its upgraded hygiene practices and wash your hands, practise cough etiquette and clean equipment as instructed.

