

**COMMUNICATIONS  
ALLIANCE LTD**



# **COVID-19: COMMUNICATIONS SECTOR TRANSITION TO A POST-PANDEMIC WORK ENVIRONMENT**

**Ensuring a safe work environment for employees and customers of the  
communications industry**

20 May 2020

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**Communications Alliance** is the primary telecommunications industry body in Australia. Its membership is drawn from a wide cross-section of the communications industry, including carriers, carriage and internet service providers, content providers, equipment vendors, IT companies, consultants and business groups.

Its vision is to provide a unified voice for the telecommunications industry and to lead it into the next generation of converging networks, technologies and services. The prime mission of Communications Alliance is to promote the growth of the Australian communications industry and the protection of consumer interests by fostering the highest standards of business ethics and behaviour through Industry self-governance.

For more details about Communications Alliance visit <http://www.commsalliance.com.au>.

## 1. Purpose of this document

National Cabinet's decisions, the efforts of those on the 'frontline' and the responsible behaviour of millions of Australians have successfully 'flattened the curve' of COVID-19 and slowed the spread of the virus, paving the way for a careful transition to a 'new normal' working environment in the Australian communications sector.

This document provides a baseline protocol for our industry to prioritise the safety of our employees and customers as we recover from enormous disruption created by the pandemic and put in place new or restored working arrangements. The industry recognises that there are important public health considerations at stake, as well as the obvious employee welfare and safety concerns. Individual organisations have worked to be cognisant of the range of State-based public health requirements, alongside the Safe Work Australia guidance. Service providers have prepared more detailed risks assessments and operating/transition plans and may implement additional or extended measures as required.

This document has been created by a working group of member company and Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) representatives, coordinated by Communications Alliance.

## 2. Primary underlying principles of transition

The health and safety of our customers and team members is our highest priority. Employees' health and wellbeing cannot be compromised as they continue to provide essential connectivity and communications services to Australians, whether that is as technicians in the field, in call and data centres, retail stores or in an office.

The official advice contained within the National Guidelines developed in consultation with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia and endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee will underpin these guidelines. As a baseline, all National COVID-19 safe workplace principles will be followed, unless over-riding State or Territory legal requirements exist or practically unfeasible in specific work environments.

Companies will also follow the directions of State and Territory medical authorities and applicable Work Health Regulators (WHR) as these are provided and updated. This information is dynamic. Accordingly, management plans will change to reflect updated advice, recommendations and regulations.

The safeguards arising from this protocol will be communicated to employees prior to its commencement.

## 3. Our responsibility

Our industry recognises its responsibility to provide information on the expected behaviours and protocols required to keep employees, customers, contractors, consultants, visitors and other partners safe.

Employees have a responsibility to their colleagues and customers to:

- not report to work if they are feeling unwell with cold or flu-like symptoms and to follow their company's protocols for reporting COVID-like symptoms to assist with trace-back exercises;
- report results from a COVID test to ensure safe return to work protocols; and
- adhere to and practice physical distancing, where practicable.

Our industry has put in place a wide range of special benefits for customers to ensure their connectivity during the pandemic and assist customers working and schooling from home, including the vulnerable or those suffering financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.

As service providers inevitably begin to transition away from these special arrangements in the future, our industry will remain mindful of the circumstances of individual customers and of the customer protection and financial hardship regulatory obligations under which the industry operates.

Each provider will continue to conduct risk assessments specific to their organisation, using the relevant resources as a guide.

Our industry will continue to observe the requirements of the *COVID-19 Human Biosecurity Emergency Declaration 2020*.

We recognise that keeping employees and customers protected means that everyone needs to do the right thing. While the communications sector is committed to the efforts needed to make its workplaces as safe as practicable, there are many interdependencies that will influence the success, or otherwise, of the programs and processes put in place. Commercial landlords, for example, need to appropriately protect common spaces and potential choke points. Public transport schedules might need to be restructured to accommodate staggered work times and to avoid usage peaks. Government coordination of these and many other such dependencies must remain a priority.

## 4. Guidelines

The table below sets out some of the areas requiring management and action by companies to promote a safe workplace environment. Guidelines should be maintained until State and/or Federal Government advice warrants a change in approach. The actions being taken by Service Providers include, but not be limited to, the following.

Management Area	Source of Advice	General Protocols
Physical distancing	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/office/physical-distancing">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/office/physical-distancing</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5 M separation; 1 person: 4m<sup>2</sup> to be maintained, where practicable, in all spaces, including call centres, retail, work areas, elevators, meeting rooms, retail queues for customers, common areas.</li> <li>• Assess practices to keep drivers and passengers COVID-safe which may include limitations on the number of people in work vehicles.</li> <li>• Use of physical barriers and marking of physical distances on floors where practicable.</li> <li>• Where specific work locations militate against strict adherence to physical distancing recommendations, strategies will be developed to minimise risk.</li> <li>• Signage about physical distancing to be placed where required.</li> <li>• Working from home (WFH) arrangements should continue if required to reduce on-site staff numbers, including to meet physical distancing/space ratio requirements above.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stagger arrival/departure times, where practicable, to reduce elevator queues and crowding on public transport.</li> <li>• Onsite cafes and restaurants will be allowed to operate in line with the relevant State rules in force over time.</li> <li>• Sharing of equipment or tools should be minimised.</li> </ul>
Hygiene	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/retail/hygiene">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/retail/hygiene</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (masks, gloves) for relevant staff members.</li> <li>• Hand sanitisers stocked at entries and throughout premises.</li> <li>• Hygiene signage in place to promote safe habits.</li> </ul>
Sanitisation	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/how-clean-and-disinfect-your-workplace-covid-19">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/how-clean-and-disinfect-your-workplace-covid-19</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional cleaning measures will be taken across company-controlled workplaces, including retail spaces, call and data centres and offices.</li> <li>• Raise awareness with employees for additional cleaning measures, including through employees themselves, in shared workspaces and for shared work equipment.</li> </ul>
Mental Wellbeing	Internal company policies and advice from relevant local authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies will support employees' wellbeing by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encouraging open discussions to enable workers to share or learn from others;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing support services ensuring workers know where support is available. Consider creating a central point of contact for workers to raise any concerns; and</li> <li>- Promoting an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available and encourage workers to use its services.</li> </ul>
Travel	<a href="https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/">https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-essential overseas travel prohibited.</li> <li>• Overseas personal travel requires 14-day isolation before return to work.</li> <li>• Interstate and intrastate travel should be minimised.</li> </ul>
Commuting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where practicable, companies will seek to minimise peak-hour travel on public transport by promoting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staggered work times;</li> <li>- WFH if the role permits this;</li> <li>- Other measures as appropriate, such as efficiently share available parking spaces; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Industry policies will take account of public transport requirements announced in each State.</li> </ul>

Communication with Employees		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication to be made with employees prior to commencement of new protocols to ensure guidelines are understood. Additional signage about physical distancing or other hygiene measures to be located where required.</li> </ul>
Visitors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External visits to workplaces should be minimised where practicable and the continuation of virtual meetings encouraged.</li> <li>• Workplace visitors will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advised on key 'stay safe' behaviours and practices, such as physical distancing and hygiene; and</li> <li>- Recorded as having visited the location, to assist contact tracing if an incident arises.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Suspected on-site employee cases	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Infographic-Suspected-or-Confirmed-Cases-COVID_19.pdf">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Infographic-Suspected-or-Confirmed-Cases-COVID_19.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers who were in close contact with suspected cases will WFH until the suspected case test is confirmed.</li> </ul>
Confirmed employee cases	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Incident-notification-fact-sheet-COVID19.pdf">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Incident-notification-fact-sheet-COVID19.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers who were in close contact with confirmed cases will WFH for 14 days and, if symptoms emerge, require testing before returning to work.</li> <li>• Incident notification to occur as per SWA guidance, and following respective State/Territory requirements.</li> </ul>
COVID-Safe app	<a href="https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app">https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry supports the Government COVIDSafe app. As part of this support, mobile carrier stores</li> </ul>

		<p>will provide assistance to customers with regard to downloading the app.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employees will be encouraged to download the app.</li></ul>
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## **5. Next Steps**

Until there is a 'Return to Normal' indication from Australian State and Federal Governments, such as alleviation of physical distancing measures, Communications Alliance and AMTA will review this document on a regular basis and liaise with Government, relevant agencies and the National Coronavirus Coordination Commission (NCCC) as required.

When needed, Communications Alliance will reconvene a working group to update this document to align with new advice.



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