
COVID-19 Guide for Seafood Processors

This guide has been adapted from Queensland Health's [COVID-19 guidance for food businesses](#) for use by seafood processors. It provides additional industry-specific considerations that may help to minimise the risks associated with COVID-19 and steps that can be taken if you suspect COVID-19 in your workplace. This is not mandated by Safe Food Production Queensland (Safe Food) but instead offers guidance for businesses.

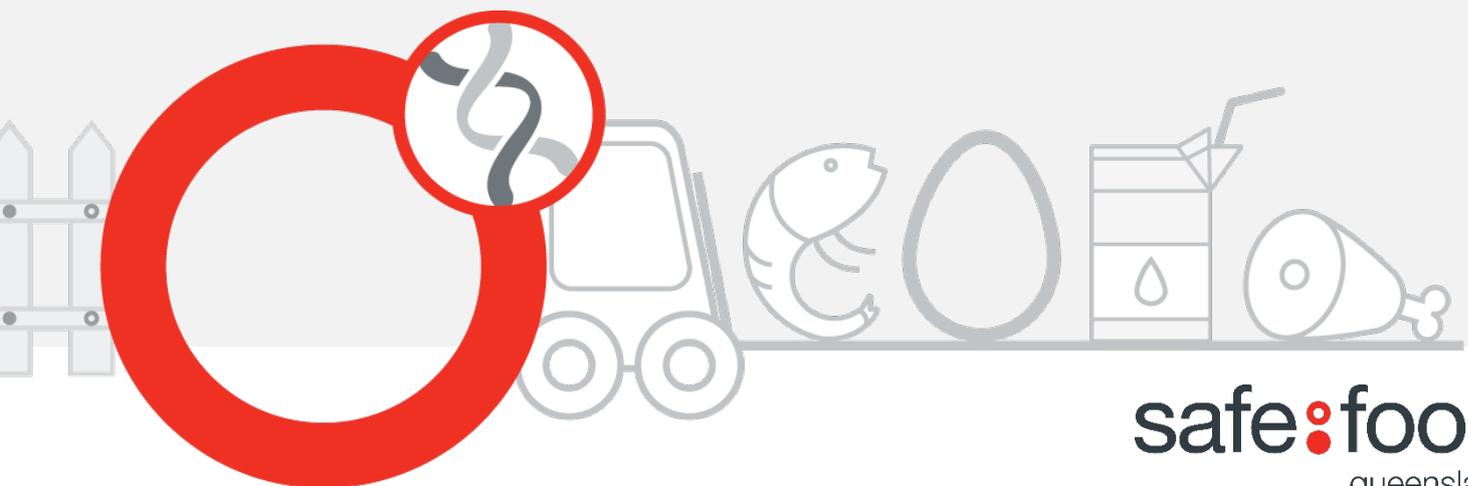
Businesses that are well prepared and have documented procedures in place can minimise their impact if a worker is diagnosed with COVID-19.

It is important that businesses regularly check for new requirements introduced in Queensland to control COVID-19 via the [Queensland Government COVID-19 Hub](#) and [Safe Food's website](#).

Revisions to Version 2 of this document are indicated in italics

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You have an important role in protecting your employees and customers during the COVID-19 pandemic

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You have an important role in protecting your employees and customers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Objective

This guide has been designed to help persons-in-charge (owner, manager, supervisor) of seafood processing businesses accredited with Safe Food to understand their responsibilities in relation to COVID-19 and managing their business. We want your business to continue to operate and provide safe food. Completing this guide will help you:

- review your **food safety management system**
- assess your **inputs**
- implement **health and hygiene controls**
- provide appropriate **skills and knowledge** training and resources for all staff
- consider the design and construction of your premises, equipment and vehicles to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Overview

Every seafood processing business is different, so the general principles recommended in this guide will need to be tailored to your needs. The practices you choose will depend on the scale of your production environment, the number of employees you have, the knowledge and skills across your work force, the facilities and equipment in place and the day-to-day management of operations.

Simple preventative measures, together with monitoring and reporting will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 for your business.

Note: there are many specific guidance documents provided by individual government departments. This guide brings these elements together for you.

What	Purpose	Key topics	Main resource
Workplace health and safety	Keep workers safe	worker health staffing policies	Safe Work Australia www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/covid-19-resource-kit
	Provide a safe workplace	PPE	
Limiting spread of infectious disease	Protecting the community	social distance handwashing and	Department of Health www.health.gov.au
	Chief Health Officer Health Directions	hygiene	Queensland Health www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19
		contact tracing and investigation	
		patient testing and treatment	



1.0 How can I protect my business from COVID-19?

If an employee or customer of your business is suspected or confirmed with COVID-19, it may impact your business operations. Queensland Health will conduct [contact tracing](#) investigations to determine if there is a risk of exposure to others in your business. This may result in employees having to self-isolate for 14 days. Therefore, it makes good business sense to take measures to reduce the risk.

1.1 Personal hygiene, cleaning and sanitation

The best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are to ensure staff who are ill stay home and don't come to work and through good personal hygiene practices, cleaning and sanitation.

Businesses and employees should already be practicing good hygiene to comply with food safety standards. However, it is worthwhile increasing personal hygiene and cleaning regimes to minimise any possible person-to-person or person-to-surface transmission.

Queensland Health has a range of [resources](#) and [translated resources](#) that can be used to create visual reminders and increase good hygiene practices in the workplace. [Translated resources](#) from the Australian Government (posters and videos) are also available.

Seafood processors should:

- document the additional hygiene and management controls they have implemented* (refer to the record-keeping forms mentioned in box below in this guide)
- maintain records of additional cleaning and sign-off on cleaning of high contact and common areas*
- restrict face-to-face meetings as much as possible
- encourage staff to get a 'flu shot' (influenza vaccine) to help reduce any combined impact of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 on staffing and production
- encourage staff to [get vaccinated against COVID-19](#) when a vaccine is made available to them*
- screen staff coming to work to determine if they are experiencing any flu-like symptoms
- ensure handwash stations are easily accessible and stocked with soap and paper towel at all times
- provide additional hand sanitiser or anti-bacterial wipes for employees to use regularly
- reinforce the need for employees to their wash hands or sanitise after handling money
- increase the frequency of monitoring personal hygiene, cleaning, and social distancing procedures.

It is recommended you create a COVID-19 cleaning roster to ensure high-contact surfaces are being cleaned on a regular basis.

***[Record-keeping templates](#) are available from the Queensland Government.**



Ensure high-contact surfaces and shared amenities are cleaned thoroughly and regularly. This can include, but is not limited to:

- door and fridge handles
- taps, break rooms and toilets
- self-serve fridges, counters and glass retail cabinets
- cash registers and EFTPOS machines
- phones, pens and stationery items
- shopping trolleys and baskets
- product thermometers
- scales

1.2 Staff knowledge and awareness

All staff must follow the hygiene and illness policy as outlined in your approved Food Safety Program.

Any staff returning from overseas or interstate must self-quarantine for 14 days prior to returning to work.

It is important staff are aware that they need to report any illness to you in case they need to self-isolate. Discuss job security, sick leave, leave payments/arrangements to encourage staff to self-report any illness without consequences.

- All staff should have a good understanding and awareness of COVID-19 and how it can affect them, your business and your customers. Use Queensland Health's [resources](#) to remind staff of the importance of implementing controls to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Develop additional work instructions for employees highlighting the additional workplace requirements they need to follow (e.g. limit contact with customers, delivery drivers and contractors)
- Provide additional training to all staff members on new workplace requirements and sign off employment records once completed*
- Display clear signage at entry points of seafood preparation areas reminding staff of personal hygiene, regular hand washing and social distancing requirements.



1.3 Adequate social distancing and segregation

It is important businesses follow government guidelines and practice the physical distancing rule of 1.5 metres between persons *and abide by Qld Health's recommendations regarding the number of people allowed per square metre indoors*. [Social distancing measures](#) can be found on the Queensland Health website.

Ensure your business, including any processing areas, are adequately spaced to accommodate staff being able to work 1.5m from each other where it is safe to do so.

If your seafood processing environment makes this difficult, consider what additional measures can be put in place to protect employees. This may require changes to the current way your business is run and could include the following management and customer controls.

Management Controls

- Limit the number of staff in seafood preparation areas at any one time
- Separate seafood preparation areas into zones to accommodate social distancing requirements
- Stagger workstations on either side of preparation benches so that employees are not facing one another
- Adjust production schedules to facilitate staff maintaining the 1.5m distancing rule where practical
- Stagger smoko and lunch breaks and ensure common areas are cleaned between shifts/breaks
- Ensure employees on breaks (in lunchrooms, smoking areas etc.) stay at least 1.5m away from each other
- Split employees into teams on alternating shifts (if size allows it) – consider if employees live together or travel together that they remain on the same work team or shifts
- Appoint specific duties to specific employees at designated areas to prevent unnecessary movement
- Arrange for food display cabinets located in customer service areas to be filled and products rotated before customers are permitted entry to the premise
- Remind staff of community social distancing rules outside of work
- Organise extra staff on stand-by in case employees become sick or are required to self-isolate
- Train workers who need to use PPE in how to put it on, use it and take it off correctly in the context of their current and potential duties.

Staff working in areas where social distancing is not practical should use other controls, including PPE such as face masks and disposable gloves, in conjunction with strict personal hygiene controls.



Customer Controls

When customers enter your premises, make sure they follow social distancing rules to limit the introduction of COVID-19 into the premises. It is recommended you:

- have a single entrance with signage placed at the entry and within the customer service area, asking customers to sanitise their hands before entry and maintain 1.5m apart when queuing
- control the numbers of customers who enter your premise to avoid exceeding one person per 4 square metres
- provide hand sanitisers at customer store entry and exit points
- use floor markings inside the premise to facilitate compliance with social distancing, particularly in crowded areas, such as serving and checkout counters
- consider physical barriers (clear perspex) at cash registers and service counters as an additional level of protection for staff
- encourage the use of contactless payments
- consider adapting your business model to encourage customers to order online or over the phone for pick up or delivery
- provide wipes (or other forms of sanitisation) for customers to clean the handles of shopping trolleys and baskets; or assign staff to disinfect handles of shopping trolleys after each use (in shopping centre environments).
- From 9 July 2021, some businesses are required to have the Check In QLD app for staff, customers and visitors to use. To see whether this applies to your business, check [here](#).*

2.0 Contingency planning

Now is the time to prepare and consider what you can put in place to minimise the impact of COVID-19 in your business and what you will do if your business becomes affected. These contingencies should be documented and explained to staff.

Think about questions like:

- what will your response be if COVID-19 is associated with your business?
- how will production in your business be impacted in the event of a reduced workforce?
- do you need to cross-train your staff to be able to perform other duties? How long will this take?
- will COVID-19 impact the supply of inputs, ingredients, packaging, chemicals or PPE in your business? Can you source these from a local or alternative supplier if needed?
- what will you do if an essential service supplier is impacted by COVID-19 (e.g. your payroll provider, contract cleaners, transport companies, equipment spare parts, refrigeration mechanic etc?)
- how will you manage seafood products if your employees are required to self-isolate?



2.1 What happens if a staff member gets COVID-19?

Your staff illness policy outlined in your approved Food Safety Program should prohibit sick workers from coming to work.

You are not expected, and should not try, to diagnose people. However, you have a duty to minimise the risk of workers and others in the workplace being exposed to COVID-19, so far as reasonably practicable.

Queensland Health is responsible for [contact tracing](#) to prevent the spread of contagious viruses throughout the community.

Employers should stay up-to-date on Queensland's border restrictions and declared COVID-19 hotspots within Australia. Workers who have visited any of these declared hotspots must follow the health directions by QLD Health regarding testing and quarantine

If the person you are concerned about is at the workplace:

1. **Isolate** the employee to prevent the spread. Provide disposable surgical masks (if available) for the person to wear.
2. **Call** Queensland Health on 13-HEALTH (13 43 25 84). This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
3. **Transport.** Ensure the person has transport to their home or to a medical facility (avoid public transport).
4. **Clean** and disinfect the areas where the person and close contacts have been. Use PPE when cleaning.
5. **Identify and inform.** Consider who the person has had close contact with. Be sensitive to personal privacy matters. Follow instructions provided by public health officials.
6. **Review** risk management controls and consult with workers.

Follow Queensland Health instructions

If one of your employees is implicated in trace back activities for someone *suspected* of having COVID-19, they must follow Queensland Health instructions. This may include seeking medical advice and going into [self-isolation](#).

If a staff member tests positive for COVID-19, Queensland Health will investigate if other staff members have been in *close contact* with that person. If Queensland Health or your business determine staff have been in close contact, they will be required to [self-quarantine](#).

"Close contact" means the following:

- *A person who has had face-to-face contact for any amount of time or shared a closed space for at least 1 hour with a confirmed case during their infectious period;*
- *Been to a venue or location where the risk of transmission is considered high based on public health assessment;*
- *Been identified by public health authorities to be at high risk for developing COVID-19 as they have or may have been in contact with someone with COVID-19, for example*



in a school or other institutional setting.

- *The local public health unit will tell you if you have been deemed a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. They may direct you to quarantine for a specified period, such as 14 days. If you get sick with any COVID-19 symptoms during that period, even mild, get tested immediately.*

It is recommended you have information readily available to assist Queensland Health contact tracing investigations. This allows for a quick and efficient response.

Prepare contact tracing documentation:

- a site plan showing where each workstation or team is positioned and employees' usual pathways or positions
- staff roster detailing who worked what days and/or shifts (where applicable) and for how long
- updated contact details of all your employees
- visitor records of any contractors or suppliers who entered your premise to provide essential services. This should include name, contact number, purpose and duration of visit.

Seafood processors must cooperate with public health officials to rapidly trace any close contacts of a confirmed case (including employees) in order to minimise further risk of spread. *Close contacts will be asked to isolate at home or in an approved facility at the direction of public health authorities.*

For more information seek advice from Queensland Health.

Potential business closure

If your business hasn't prepared or doesn't have documented plans and records in place, (such as those in this guideline) you may not have evidence to show adequate mitigation of the risk of transmitting COVID-19. In this case, if employees are deemed a 'close contact' to a confirmed case, Queensland Health may require staff to self-quarantine for 14 days, which could impact on your business operational capacity and may cause you to close.

If your business is situated within a shopping centre, you should advise centre management or body corporate of the closure of your business. You should also maintain communication with centre management during and after the closure of your premises.

How should I manage my stock during a store closure?

In the event of workforce shortages that require you to shut your business, it is recommended you consider the following:

- place any work in progress, or short shelf-life seafood products into packs and either take them home for your own use, give them to your employees to take home to their families, or donate to local charitable organisation
- dispose of all remaining work in progress, or short shelf-life stock to ensure food safety



is maintained

- conduct a stocktake to check the expiry date on refrigerated seafood products. Take home for own use or give to your employees anything that will expire during the closure period or discard
- for all other remaining seafood products either store them according to manufacturer's instructions on label or consider what can be packaged and frozen.
- for all seafood products undergoing further storage on site, ensure they are:
 - stored in packaging that will protect them from deteriorating or becoming unsafe
 - labelled with date packed and other information to allow for full traceability
 - stored appropriately (e.g. separation of raw/cooked products).

Dry goods

- Check best-before or use-by dates and discard if they are likely to go out of date during the closure period
- All remaining dry goods should be packaged and stored according to labelled instructions.

Waste

- Contact waste contractor to arrange for immediate pick up of food waste
- Place all other paper waste into sealed garbage bags and dispose of into waste management bins to prevent pests and vermin incursion during the closure.

Please remember that any staff member who is required to self-isolate or self-quarantine must do so **immediately**. The above actions should be carried out by a trained staff member who is not required to self-isolate. It is therefore recommended that you have a clear plan in place to ensure the above actions can be completed if required.

Is there anything else I need to do during a store closure?

- Follow all Queensland Health directions
- Notify Safe Food of any COVID-19 detections and directions given to you by Queensland Health
- Notify all suppliers to cancel deliveries during the closure period e.g. seafood deliveries, dry goods, chemical and packaging companies
- Conduct a thorough clean and sanitation of your premise – refer to the cleaning and sanitation section for more information.

Conducting a deep clean and sanitation

If an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and you are permitted to remain operating (through Queensland Health advice), a deep clean and sanitation of your business must be performed prior to recommencing.



This should include:

- thorough clean-down of all floors, walls and ceilings as well as all benches, door handles, utensils, equipment and any employee touchpoints (including pens, light switches, thermometers, clipboards, cleaning chemicals, containers, etc.)
- after a full clean-down, the premises must be sanitised using a food-grade sanitiser.

Once the premise has had a [deep clean](#), organise a suitably competent, non-implicated member of staff, family or centre management (if applicable) to visit the premises and check refrigeration temperatures during the closure period. Alternatively, consider using a data logger to monitor the ambient temperature of cold rooms and freezers to ensure product is maintained at the correct temperature during the closure.

Business recovery and diversification

If you are considering expanding your product range, you may need to update your approved food safety program and submit this to Safe Food for review. Please contact Safe Food by email: info@safefood.qld.gov.au

Please note that the retail sale of seafood (e.g. fish and chips) is an activity that may require a Food Business Licence issued by your local government under the *Food Act 2006*. If you are considering alternative supply methods (dinner boxes, retail supply, food truck etc.) you should contact your local council to check that any additional requirements are being met.

You can search the [Local Government Directory](#) to find contact details and [locality maps](#) for Queensland's local councils.

More information

The science around COVID-19 and its transmission is rapidly evolving. Safe Food recommends that you regularly review your COVID-19 related plans and procedures to ensure they are updated to reflect the most current advice.

After completing this guide, it is recommended that you use the **Checklist on COVID-19 risk management measures** (found on pages 9-18 of Queensland Health's [Workplace Health Management Plan Template](#)). This will help you understand what a contact tracing officer may look for to assess your current arrangements.

If you would like assistance with reviewing your plans, contact Safe Food by email info@safefood.qld.gov.au

*Record keeping forms mentioned throughout this guide, that support the elements of the [Health Management Plan](#) template, can be found [here](#).

An electronic copy of this guide and checklist is available on Safe Food's website: <https://www.safefood.qld.gov.au/covid-19-advice/> (under Resources)