

Dear Meatworks Plant Manager/Operator,

The meat processing sector has been identified as representing a high risk for the transmission of COVID-19 in the community.

The purpose of this letter and the accompanying Incident Action Plan (IAP) is to provide vital information necessary to prevent, and where necessary, to facilitate a rapid response to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in an employee.

The enclosed IAP represents a joint approach by NSW Health, the Department of Primary Industries and SafeWork NSW to protect meatworks employees and the broader community from COVID-19. The IAP should be part of your business continuity plans that address other important issues such as animal welfare and the upstream and downstream consequences that may arise from interruption to plant operations associated with a COVID-19 outbreak.

The virus which causes COVID-19 disease, SARS CoV-2, can cause outbreaks in certain populations or situations in our community. You may be aware that there have been large outbreaks in abattoirs and meat processing facilities across the world. In Australia, Cedar Meats in Melbourne was closed for six weeks because of an outbreak among its workers and their contacts. These workplaces are vulnerable for a number of reasons;

- Working on production lines in close proximity to others
- Tally driven work tempo which limits hygiene measures
- Temperature and Humidity
- High workforce turnover

There are 10 key health issues which owners and operators of meat processing plants should understand in relation to COVID-19 risks;

1. Even one case of COVID-19 among your employees may result in temporary shutdown of your plant until the scale of the outbreak is determined.
2. The more rapidly cases and contacts can be identified, the more likely the outbreak can be contained, and the more rapid will be re-opening of the plant. Testing of all employees maybe the most efficient means of achieving this objective¹.
3. Developing a **COVID Safety Plan** will help prepare your organisation and reduce the likelihood of plant shutdown. Worksafe Victoria have produced comprehensive guidance about the development of these plans. It is strongly recommended that you consider this guidance in preparing your own plan. Please follow the enclosed link: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/managing-covid-19-exposure-meat-and-poultry-processing>
4. It is vitally important that all workers understand that they **MUST NOT** come to work if they develop respiratory symptoms like a cough, fever or sore throat.
5. NSW Health is notified of all positive COVID-19 tests from NSW laboratories (public and private) and will generally be notifying you if a case has worked at your business while

¹ Whilst testing of all employees would be appropriate in an outbreak setting, a negative result at the time of testing does not preclude that these individuals could go on to develop symptoms and could become positive later. As such, it is important that if symptoms subsequently develop, the individuals need to self-isolate and seek urgent testing

infections. However, if a worker at your plant is diagnosed with COVID-19, then the following steps need to be taken quickly:

- Ring your local Public Health Unit and inform them that you have detected the disease in your workplace 1300 066 055.
 - **On the same day, and certainly within the first 12 hours**, you will be asked to provide the names and contact details of all people who have had close contact with the case inside or outside the workplace in the 48 hours before they developed symptoms until the present.
 - You will need to provide rosters of all people who are identified as close contacts
6. A **close contact** is defined as anyone with face-to-face contact with a confirmed or probable case either in the work setting or elsewhere, for greater than 15 minutes cumulative over the course of a week, in the period extending from 48 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed or probable case,
OR
sharing of a closed space with a confirmed or probable case for a prolonged period of more than 2 hours in the period extending from 48 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed or probable case.
7. Notify SafeWork NSW (13 10 50) if a worker is confirmed as having COVID-19 and/ or if close contacts are identified within the workplace. It is a requirement under Work Health and Safety legislation to notify the regulator of serious illnesses (including COVID-19) arising out of work.
8. **On the same day, and certainly within the first 12 hours after a case is identified**, the Public Health Unit, in consultation with plant management will nominate who on the contact list will need to go into home isolation and who will need to be tested for coronavirus, or be transferred to hospital for treatment.
9. In the days which follow, a wider investigation is likely to reveal the source of the case and their immediate contacts. This step will involve scrutiny of rosters and contact details of casual staff who may have been employed at the facility.
10. It is important to ensure effective and regular communication between management and the public health unit, so that the staff and the community are well informed about the progress of the outbreak and further preventive steps which need to be taken.

For more information, contact your local Public Health Unit on **1300 066 055**.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kerry Chant PSM
**Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary
Population and Public Health**