

Critical COVID-19 Response Information for Queensland Employers

Current as at 10:30am, Friday 19 June 2020

The following information is intended to assist businesses to navigate the unprecedented changes arising out of enhanced responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information about Government Response measures were current at the time of publication however, given the rapidly evolving situation, businesses should monitor reliable news sources for updated information.

What is the current Stage Response?

The Queensland Government has released a [roadmap](#) for easing the restrictions that were in place in response to COVID-19. Stage 1 took effect from 11.59pm on 15 May 2020 followed by Stage 2 which commenced on 1 June 2020 from 12 noon, which enabled the following:

- Queenslanders can travel anywhere in Queensland for any purpose at any time, except for restricted areas;
- Gatherings of up to 20 people in:
 - Restaurants, cafes, pubs, registered or licensed clubs, RSL clubs, hotels and casinos (no gaming) – per room or per defined area;
 - Homes;
 - Public spaces and lagoons;
 - Non-contact indoor and outdoor community;
 - Personal training;
 - Gyms, health clubs and yoga studios;
 - Pools and community sports clubs;
 - Museums, art galleries and historic sites;
 - Weddings;
 - Parks, playground equipment, skate parks and outdoor gyms;
 - Libraries;
 - Hiking, camping and other recreational activities in national and state parks;
 - Places of worship and religious and civil ceremonies.
- Recreational travel, camping and accommodation, including caravan parks (anywhere in Queensland).

As of 16 June 2020, further restrictions have eased permitting the following up to 100 people at funerals.

Further, the following businesses and operations can reconvene:

- Retail shopping;

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- Tourist accommodation;
- The following venues with a maximum 20 people at any one time:
 - Indoor cinemas;
 - Open homes and auctions;
 - Outdoor amusement parks, tourism experiences, zoos and arcades;
 - Concert venues, theatres, arenas, auditoriums and stadiums; and
 - Beauty therapy, nail salons, tanning, tattoo parlours and spas (with a COVID SAFE Checklist).

The restrictions on the headcount can vary, where there is a COVID SAFE Plan approved by health authorities.

The Stage 1 response to easing the restrictions, permitted the Businesses that are COVID SAFE can return to work. Businesses that are deemed by the Chief Health Officer as ‘higher risk’ (such as nail salons, restaurants and beauty clinics) must complete a mandatory check list. Employees returning to work must adhere to the social distancing requirements “4sqm rule”.

Subject to the [Restrictions on Businesses, Activities and Undertakings Direction](#), the following spaces and businesses continue to be prohibited from operating:

- Nightclubs; and
- Strip clubs, brothels, sex on premises venues and sole operator sex workers.

For how long will the current Stage Response be in place?

The Queensland Government will continue to monitor the progress following the first stage of easing restrictions. It is anticipated that Stage 3 of easing the restrictions will take effect on 10 July 2020.

What if I am not one of the employers that is included in the types of businesses included in the current Stage Response?

Businesses are permitted to open and operate but must adhere to the “4sqm rule”, maintain social distancing and follow other measures to mitigate against potential infection exposure.

Employees may work from home where possible.

Are the borders closed?

The [Border Restrictions Direction \(No.5\)](#) remains in effect, which means that any traveller will not be allowed to enter Queensland, unless the person ordinarily resides in Queensland or is moving to Queensland to permanently reside in Queensland, or the person is “exempt”. The following are exempt from the border restrictions:

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- National and state security and government employees;
- Health services employees;
- Agribusiness and commercial fishing employees;
- Freight;
- Emergency vehicles;
- Emergency workers;
- Those travelling to and from work;
- To comply with court orders including family court;
- Those seeking to enter on compassionate grounds; and
- Those required to obtain essential medical treatment.

The [Self-quarantine for persons arriving in Queensland from Overseas Direction \(No. 3\)](#) also remains in effect. It provides that persons who arrive in Queensland from overseas are required to self-quarantine in “nominated premises”. Certain individuals who are exempt from the requirement to self-quarantine in nominated premises include:

- airline and maritime crew;
- unaccompanied minors;
- consular employees; or
- those who are unable to live independently and without support.

Earlier in March, directions were made under s 191A of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994* for all ships entering Queensland preventing them from docking until 14 days has elapsed since it left the foreign port or since picking up crew members from a foreign country, the later of the two.

Do I need to keep paying workers?

If possible, and suitable to the employer, employees may continue to work from home. Workplaces and businesses need to continue to observe and adhere to Social Distancing Guidelines.

A [Directive](#) has been issued by the Minister for Industrial Relations to prescribe specific employment conditions in case of disruptions by a health pandemic for public service employees, in particular Special Pandemic Leave (for permanent and casual staff).

In circumstances that businesses impacted by the Queensland Premier’s announcements are subject to a stoppage of work, there may arise the basis to implement a stand down without pay, however legal advice should first be sought.

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In all cases, where an eligible business has experienced a drop in turnover of 30% or more (or 50% for a business with an annual turnover of \$1 billion or more), full time, part time and casual employees (provided the casual employee has at least 12 months service) who were employed at 1 March 2020 may be eligible to receive a flat \$1,500 per fortnight JobKeeper Payment for a 6 month period.

The \$1,500 JobKeeper payment will be payable irrespective of whether the employee is continuing to perform some paid work or whether they have been stood down without pay.

The JobKeeper payments are being administered through the Australian Taxation Office and compliance monitored through the single touch payroll system. Employers received payments from the start of May 2020, backdated to 30 March 2020.

Eligible employers can enrol for JobKeeper [here](#).

What financial relief is available in Queensland?

The Queensland State Government has announced a deferral of payroll tax for up to 6 months, and is providing grants of up to \$7,500 (excl. GST) to support new equipment purchases, immediate payroll tax refunds for business and deferrals for eligible businesses until the end of 2020 (all small and medium businesses with payroll up to \$6.5 million will be eligible, as will large businesses affected by COVID-19). The Queensland Government has announced a \$6 billion COVID-19 rescue package which includes the following:

Health	\$1.2 billion to expand fever clinics, emergency department capacity, acute care services, and regional aeromedical services for remote communities
Businesses and Jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry support package - \$1 billion support package for large and regionally significant businesses to enable scaling up and servicing the community; • Jobs assistance - \$500 million for workers and businesses who lose their job or income; • Job support loans – \$1 billion concessional jobs support loan facility interest free for the first 12 months to support businesses to keep Queenslanders employed; • Payroll tax relief – up to \$950 million including refunds, payment holidays and deferrals for eligible businesses

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax exemption for JobKeeper payments; • Commercial tenants - \$400 million support delivered as land tax relief and payment deferrals.
Bill relief	\$500 million for households and businesses, including \$200 credit for all 2.1 million Queensland homes to offset the costs of water and electricity and \$100 million in electricity bill rebates for eligible small-medium businesses.
Support for NGOS	\$28 million COVID-19 Grant Fund for the non-government sector to provide services to those affected by mental health, drug and alcohol issues, and Indigenous people
Business and Industry	\$27.25 million to assist business and industry with resilience and recovery strategies, targeted financial support and counselling. It includes fee relief through to July 2020 for tourism operators in National Parks impacted by decreased patronage
Arts	\$10.5 million to assist small-medium arts organisations.
Far North Support	\$2.3 million for Far North port businesses, providing rental relief for tourism, resource and seafood sectors
Transport	\$54.5 million passenger transport assistance package for regional bus, ferry, aviation services and personalised transport industry
State Land Rent	The Queensland Government will waive more than \$33.8 million in State land rent for 1 April to 30 September 2020 which applies to Land Act lessees, licensees or permit to occupy holders who conduct a business on state land.
Resources Sector	The Government will also waive rent for 12-months on exploration land due between 1 April and 1 September and has also frozen fees and charges until 1 July 2021. The Government has also brought forward \$2.8 million in grant funds for innovative exploration in the North West Minerals Province
What should I be thinking about in implementing working	Kingston Reid has developed a Working from Home Checklist , to which employers may refer in preparing employees to work from home.

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from home arrangements?

This [Checklist](#) is not exhaustive, and employers should have regard to any particular safety, information security and other considerations that may be unique to the work undertaken by particular employees.

What are other safety measures that I should be considering right now?

The nature of the Response measures, effect of isolation and the gradual easing of restrictions will invariably have an impact upon the mental health of all workers. Check in regularly with employees at home and ensure that all are reminded of Employee Assistance Programs.

Employers should remain mindful that, if employees are directed to return to work, and they become infected, there will foreseeably arise exposure to workers' compensation and potentially negligence claims under the workers' compensation scheme.

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