



Safety Note

25 March 2020

Physical distancing in general UQ work areas – reducing the transmission of COVID-19

What is physical distancing

Physical distancing includes ways to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. It means less contact between you and other people.

Why is it important?

Physical distancing is important because COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

So, the more space between you and others, the harder it is for the virus to spread.

What you should do?

If you are sick, stay away from others and stay at home – that is the most important thing you can do.

You should also practise good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before and after eating, after going to the toilet and after sharing items.
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and
- avoid close contact with others (i.e. stay more than 1.5m away from people).

These simple, common sense actions help reduce risk to you and to others. They will help to slow the spread of disease in the community – and you can use them every day.

Principles physical distancing while working in general work areas at UQ

- Stay at home if you are sick
- Practise reasonable physical distancing which, in this case, means avoiding unnecessary close contact with others. This can be done by attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5m between people when you are on university sites.
- The maximum number of people permitted in a workspace will need to be calculated by the local manager to ensure that the 4sqm requirement can be met. [see Physical Distancing – new restrictions safety note]. *In some cases where this restriction cannot be maintained*, and after discussion and approval of your manager, a working from home arrangement may be required.



- Reduce other opportunities for direct transmission e.g. sharing items, unnecessary touching.
- Ensure impeccable personal hygiene practices.

Recommendations / Actions

1. Most importantly, stay home if you feel ill.
2. If you, or those you live with or care for, have a medical condition that increases the risks associated with COVID-19, discuss a working from home arrangement with your supervisor.
3. Consider staff working patterns and using the entire span of hours to allow work to be staggered across the span of hours.
4. Consider spacing within the physical environment. Maintain 4sqm per person in indoor spaces. Managers will determine the footprint of the work area and determine the number of people usually located within that area. Some workers may need to work from home or work from another location to adhere to this restriction.
5. Maintain 1.5m between you and others. Keep a spare space or seat between you and the next person if possible.
6. Avoid sharing equipment as the virus can live on surfaces including pens, keyboards, table tops etc.
7. Stop the practice of handshaking as a greeting.
8. Have good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene and use hand sanitisers and soap and water often.
9. Take lunch outside rather than at a desk or in the staff room.
10. Limit food handling and the sharing of food in the workplace.
11. Regularly wash your hands before and after eating and after going to the toilet as a minimum.
12. Avoid queuing at coffee shops or food outlets, pre-order if possible.
13. Dispose of tissues immediately in the general waste bin, don't leave rubbish on tables.
14. Cancel or postpone any non-essential face to face meetings OR use technology, Zoom, Skype FaceTime or email. Check out our fact sheet on Meeting protocols in a COVID-19 environment.
15. Do not hold large face-to-face meetings. Hold essential meetings outside in the open air if possible.
16. Avoid touching your face with your fingers.
17. If food outlets provide the relevant apps, order coffee and meals via the app to avoid queuing.

Resource and links

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-physical-distancing>

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