

Working from home



How to manage occupational risks

While many Australian workplaces have had work from home arrangements in place for years, the number of employees working from home has dramatically increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began. As working from home full-time or partially has become the new norm, the review and assessment of the occupational risks remains important for many employers.

Working from home presents businesses with additional occupational risks and may be managed differently to those in the usual workplace⁽ⁱ⁾

Home office ergonomics and equipment

Equipment that's not designed with safe ergonomics in mind, or is improperly set up, can have a huge impact on workers' physical wellbeing.

Work environment

Noise level, room temperatures, layout of the designated working area and lighting can all have an effect.

Electrical safety

Electrical equipment, such as computers and printers, should be in good working order with no frayed power cables or other risks.

Musculoskeletal risks

These can be associated with slips, trips and falls. As such, a home workspace should be kept free of hazards which may cause this.

First aid & emergency

Every worker should have access to first aid gear and emergency contact information.

Working from home can also present psychosocial risks, including⁽ⁱⁱ⁾:

- working in isolation
- workstation set up inconsistent with ergonomic principles
- poorly managed organisational change and job insecurity
- ineffective communication and a lack of support from management or colleagues
- other responsibilities around the home such as caring for children

In some cases, requiring a worker to work from home may expose them to an increased risk of family or domestic violence. While this may not be a direct result of work-related duties, the worker's home is also their workplace in a work-from-home scenario, so employers still have a responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure that environment is safe.

This can be a sensitive topic, and difficult for some to discuss, so employers should encourage workers to be open about potential risks and assure them that their privacy will be maintained. More information is available via [Safe Work Australia](#).

Duty of care

Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws still apply if workers are required to work somewhere other than their usual workplace — for example, from their home. The WHS laws apply to both physical and mental health.

Workers are also responsible for taking reasonable care of their own health and safety. This can include complying with reasonable instructions given by their employer, or any relevant policies and procedures⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾. Safe Work Australia also provides a COVID-19 workplace checklist to help employers identify how to keep their workers safe and limit the spread of COVID-19.

⁽ⁱ⁾ SafeWork Australia, 'Working from home, Managing risks', viewed on 16 June 2022, <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/working-home/managing-risks>

⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ WorkSafe Victoria, 'Work-related stress – remote and isolated work', 11 October 2021, viewed on 16 June 2022, <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/work-related-stress-remote-and-isolated-work>

⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ SafeWork Australia, 'Duties under WHS laws', viewed on 16 June 2022, <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation/duties-under-whs-laws>

Risk controls to consider

For employers:

- Complete a risk assessment of the intended workplace for each worker. A health and safety checklist could be used to ensure it addresses the various risks.
- Provide training for workers to ensure their home working environment has been appropriately set up.
- Provide workers with appropriate emergency management information, in case they encounter a hazard or incident.
- Ensure the ability to regularly communicate with workers who work from home.
- Provide suitable planning, management and communication processes for organisational changes as they occur.
- Ensure that all workers are aware of resources that are available to them in the event of domestic or family violence, including entitlements like paid leave, and services such as confidential counselling.

For employees:

- Create and maintain a clearly defined home office space, which is not accessed by other people or pets during working hours and is separate to other activities of the home, where possible.
- Keep the immediate working environment maintained, to prevent incidents.
- Review and understand emergency evacuation from the home office and ensure exit routes are always kept clear.
- Maintain equipment for the home office in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and best practice.
- Comply with guidance relating to ergonomic practices.
- Report any safety or personal security incident to your supervisor/leader immediately.
- Maintain regular communication with your leader/supervisor.

**For more information
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