

COVID-19 Contractor Protocol

All public housing in Victoria

5 August 2020

Application of protocol

This protocol applies to all contractors and consultants engaged by the Asset Management Unit of the Department of Health and Human Services to perform work or services for the maintenance or upgrade of public housing properties anywhere in Victoria.

All references to 'contractor' in this document are to be taken as applying to both contractors and consultants. The protocol applies to all public housing, which includes properties managed by the Department of Health and Human Services and properties managed by community agencies (Out of Home Care, Specialist Disability Accommodation, Family Violence Accommodation, Youth Crisis Accommodation and Transitional Housing Management).

This protocol provides instructions to contractors on procedures and measures to be followed to protect against the spread of COVID-19. The procedures and measures outlined in this document are for the benefit of contractor health and safety, and for the health and safety of tenants residing in public housing properties.

Contents

This protocol firstly outlines the work that can be undertaken under each stage of COVID-19 restrictions issued by the Victorian State Government.

The protocol then outlines the procedures and measures to be followed for:

- Maintenance work in tenanted properties
- Upgrade work in tenanted properties
- Movable unit work in tenanted and private properties
- Work in common areas of public housing estates

The document then outlines general requirements for COVID-19 safety precautions and well being.

COVID-19 stage restrictions

The table below outlines the types of work that can be undertaken by contractors at public housing properties during each stage of COVID-19 restrictions issued by the Victorian State Government.

Type of work	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4*
Critical & Urgent Maintenance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Priority & Normal Maintenance	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Safety & compliance (lifts, lights, fire services, alarms, gas heater program)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vacant property / unit maintenance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (excluding high rise)
Tenanted property upgrades	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Vacant property upgrades	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Fire damage reinstatement	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Methamphetamine contamination remediation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Disability modifications	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (except where urgent)
Movable unit installation/removal	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Property condition audits	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Cleaning and security audits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Security services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estate common areas - normal cleaning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estate common areas – sanitisation cleaning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estate common areas – grounds maintenance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sharps collection	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pest control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vacant land maintenance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demolitions	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

NOTES:

- * Contractors are to have a COVID Safe Plan in place to undertake work during Stage 4
- There may be exceptions to the advice outlined above – contractors will be advised by the department in writing where this applies

Maintenance work in tenanted properties

Refer to the protocol outlined in **Attachment 1**.

Upgrade work in tenanted properties

Before commencing upgrade works at a tenanted property, the upgrade contractor is to ask the tenant the questions below in regard to COVID-19. Each day upon returning to the property, the contractor is also to ask the questions.

In response to COVID-19 (also known as the Coronavirus), I will need to ask you the following questions before proceeding with the upgrade works.

- *Have you been overseas in the last two weeks or been in contact with anyone who has returned from overseas in the last two weeks?*
- *Have you been diagnosed with coronavirus and are currently in isolation?*
- *Are you in a period of 14-day quarantine as directed by a health professional?*
- *Have you been identified as a close contact with anyone who has coronavirus? (A close contact is someone who has spent greater than 15 minutes face-to-face, cumulative, or has shared a closed space for more than two hours, cumulative, with a confirmed case of coronavirus)*
- *Are you experiencing any of these symptoms: Fever, Chills, Cough, Sore throat, Shortness of breath, Runny nose or Loss of sense of smell?*

If the tenant answers 'YES' to any of the above, the tenant is to be advised the upgrade works must be placed on hold and that the contractor will contact them after two weeks has passed to discuss completion of the works.

If the tenant answers 'NO' to all of the above, the tenant is to be advised all occupants and visitors at the property must wear a face covering and maintain a minimum separation of 1.5m from the upgrade contractor staff at all times. The tenant is to be advised the contractor will provide them with face masks if they do not have any face coverings available. The tenant is to advise the upgrade works will not be completed unless face coverings are worn by all persons at the property and those persons must observe social distancing at all times.

The upgrade contractor must also check daily that their staff and any subcontractor working at the property answer 'NO' to all of the above questions. Before commencing work each day, the upgrade contractor must confirm with the tenant they have checked that their staff and subcontractors answer 'NO' to the above questions.

When working at public housing properties, upgrade contractors are at all times to:

- Wear a surgical face mask
- Wear safety goggles or face shield
- Wear disposable gloves and disposable coveralls/gown if contact with blood or bodily fluids is likely
- Practice appropriate hand hygiene
- Practice social distancing (minimum 1.5m separation from others)

The expectations of tenants, occupants and their visitors while the contractor undertakes the work are:

- Wear a face covering (face mask supplied by the contractor if the tenant does not have their own)
- Maintain social distancing

If tenants, occupants and their visitors do not adhere to the above requirements, the contractor is to request they comply. If they do not then comply, the contractor is to leave the site immediately and report this behaviour to the department contract manager.

Upgrade contractors are to remove their tools and equipment from site at the end of each day. Tools and equipment are also to be cleaned and disinfected daily (for example with 70% alcohol wipes or a bleach-based disinfectant). Materials required for the upgrade may be left on site provided they are safely placed/stored.

Movable unit works in tenanted and private properties

Before commencing installation or removal of a movable unit at a property, the contractor is to ask the tenant (or the owner or occupant for a private property) the questions below in regard to COVID-19. Each day upon returning to the property, the contractor is also to ask the questions.

In response to COVID-19 (also known as the Coronavirus), I will need to ask you the following questions before proceeding with the work.

- *Have you been overseas in the last two weeks or been in contact with anyone who has returned from overseas in the last two weeks?*
- *Have you been diagnosed with coronavirus and are currently in isolation?*
- *Are you in a period of 14-day quarantine as directed by a health professional?*
- *Have you been identified as a close contact with anyone who has coronavirus? (A close contact is someone who has spent greater than 15 minutes face-to-face, cumulative, or has shared a closed space for more than two hours, cumulative, with a confirmed case of coronavirus)*
- *Are you experiencing any of these symptoms: Fever, Chills, Cough, Sore throat, Shortness of breath, Runny nose or Loss of sense of smell?*

If the tenant, occupant or owner answers '**YES**' to any of the above, they are to be advised the works must be placed on hold and that the contractor will contact them after two weeks has passed to discuss completion of the works.

If the tenant, occupant or owner answers '**NO**' to all of the above, the tenant, occupant or owner is to be advised all occupants and visitors at the property must wear a face covering and maintain a minimum separation of 1.5m from the contractor staff at all times. They are to be advised the contractor will provide them with face masks if they do not have any face coverings available. They are to be advised the works will not be completed unless face coverings are worn by all persons at the property and those persons must observe social distancing at all times.

The contractor must also check daily that their staff and any subcontractor working at the property answer '**NO**' to all of the above questions. Before commencing work each day, the contractor must confirm with the tenant, occupant or owner they have checked that their staff and subcontractors answer '**NO**' to the above questions.

When working at public housing properties, contractors are at all times to:

- Wear a surgical face mask
- Wear safety goggles or face shield
- Wear disposable gloves and disposable coveralls/gown if contact with blood or bodily fluids is likely
- Practice appropriate hand hygiene
- Practice social distancing (minimum 1.5m separation from others)

The expectations of tenants, occupants and their visitors while the contractor undertakes the work are:

- Wear a face covering (face mask supplied by the contractor if the tenant does not have their own)
- Maintain social distancing

If tenants, occupants, owners or their visitors do not adhere to the above requirements, the contractor is to request they comply. If they do not then comply, the contractor is to leave the site immediately and report this behaviour to the department contract manager.

Contractors are to remove their tools and equipment from site at the end of each day. Tools and equipment are also to be cleaned and disinfected daily (for example with 70% alcohol wipes or a bleach-based disinfectant). Materials required may be left on site provided they are safely placed/stored.

Work in common areas of public housing estates

Public housing estates often contain shared or common areas that are not part of the private space occupied by tenants.

- Indoor common areas include spaces such as foyers, corridors, stairwells and lifts.
- Outdoor common areas include spaces such as lawns, gardens, playgrounds, paths and car parks.

Contractors that typically perform work in estate common areas are:

- Security guards
- Cleaners
- Pest control contractors
- Sharps disposal contractors
- Fire services contractors
- Lift technicians
- Specialist plant and equipment contractors
- Maintenance contractors
- Garden maintenance contractors

When working in common areas of public housing estates, contractors are at all times to:

- Wear a surgical face mask
- Wear safety goggles or face shield
- Wear disposable gloves and disposable coveralls/gown if contact with blood or bodily fluids is likely
- Practice appropriate hand hygiene
- Practice social distancing (minimum 1.5m separation from others)

The expectations of tenants, occupants and their visitors while the contractor undertakes work are:

- Wear a face covering
- Maintain social distancing

If tenants, occupants and their visitors do not adhere to the above requirements, the contractor is to request they comply. If they do not then comply, the contractor is to leave the site immediately and report this behaviour to the department contract manager.

General requirements

Contractor well being

The department is committed to supporting contractor health, safety and wellbeing and acknowledge the current challenging environment. Contractor psychological and physical health, safety and wellbeing is paramount. Plan to go home safely every day. The objective of the department is to support you in performing your work AND enable you to go home safely each day to your life outside of work.

Take reasonable care for your own health and safety and the health and safety of others (including members of the public) by paying attention to the way you are working and ensuring you follow all work instructions.

Correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

It is essential that all staff are trained in the correct use of PPE – putting it on (donning) and removing (doffing), before it is used to ensure cross contamination does not occur. This includes use of face masks, gloves, protective eye wear, gowns or coveralls.

Face Masks

Face masks must be worn by contractors at all public housing and department sites. Face masks must be worn indoors and outdoors at all times. Face masks must be disposable surgical masks (P2 or N95 respirator/masks are not required).

Procedure for putting on a mask

1. Perform hand hygiene using the alcohol-based hand rub
2. Put on the mask handling the side tapes or loops only:
 - a. If your mask has the ear loops, place them over both ears together
 - b. If your mask has to be tied, tie the bottom first and then the top to secure on your face
 - c. Ensure the mask is secured across the bridge of your nose (mould metal clip over bridge of nose) and ensure it sits snugly under the chin
 - d. Ensure that the mask is covering your mouth and nose at all times. **DO NOT** wear the mask around your neck or under your nose. **DO NOT** touch the mask.
3. Perform hand hygiene.
4. After mask is in place never touch the front of your mask.

Procedure for taking off a mask

1. Perform hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand rub
2. **DO NOT** touch the front of the mask
3. Undo the bottom tie of your mask first and then the top tie. Handling the mask only by the top ties, drop the mask straight into a general waste bin.
4. If your mask has the ear loops, remove handling the loops only and place into a general waste bin.
5. Perform hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand rub

When using a mask:

- Single-use masks must not be reused but discarded immediately after use. If you have to take your mask off for any reason, you must throw it out.
- Masks must not be pulled down or removed and reused to consume food or drink or to talk to people.

- Masks can be used for up to 4 hours continuously but must be discarded if they become damp, dirty or damaged.
- Hand hygiene should be performed when you feel that you may have contaminated your hands from touching your face or mask if wearing one.

Safety goggles or face shields

Protective eye wear must be used by contractors at all times at public housing properties. Protective eye wear can either be safety goggles or face shields. Your own glasses are not sufficient. If goggles will not fit over your own glasses, then a face shield is to be worn.

- You may continuously wear eye protection
- Hand hygiene should be performed when you feel that you may have contaminated your hands from touching your eye protection.
- Both disposable and reusable goggles / face shields may be used.
- If your eye protection is single use, discard immediately when removed and place into a general waste bin.
- If your eye protection is reusable, it must be cleaned and disinfected immediately after it is removed (for example with 70% alcohol wipes or a bleach-based disinfectant).
- Do not share protective eyewear.
- Store clean protective eyewear in a container or bag.

Social distancing

You must always be physically distancing from others (at least 1.5 metres), even when wearing a face mask. Do not engage in personal greetings, for example hugging, handshakes. Wearing a face mask provides an additional physical barrier to coronavirus (COVID-19), however face masks are not a substitute for physical distancing.

It is important not to be complacent with physical distancing and other infection control practices when wearing a face mask.

You are reminded that the health and safety of everyone on this site is a shared responsibility by all staff and contractors. Physical distancing is one of the key ways to control the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

It is your legal obligation to take care of your own health and safety, and the health and safety of others by maintaining at least 1.5m distance from others. Ignoring the physical distancing rule puts you at risk of individual liability under OHS laws and more importantly puts your own health, your family, your fellow colleagues, their families and the community at risk.

If you are at the workplace and observed not to be physically distancing in circumstances where you are able to, you may be asked to leave the site immediately and in certain circumstances may not be permitted to return to work at the site.

Hand hygiene

Effective hand hygiene (washing and sanitising your hands properly) is essential in preventing COVID-19 infection.

Hands should be washed with soap and water if they are visibly soiled (dirty), otherwise you can use an alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitiser). Hand sanitisers are to contain a minimum alcohol content of 70%.

Gloves are NOT a substitute for hand hygiene. Proper hand hygiene is more protective than wearing gloves for COVID-19.

Only wear disposal gloves when the duty you are performing will likely require handling of items contaminated with blood or body fluids. Perform hand hygiene with an alcohol-based hand rub before putting gloves on and after taking them off. When the task that the gloves were required for is complete, gloves are to be removed immediately and placed in the bin.

If the duty does not require handling of items that may be contaminated with blood or body fluids, gloves do not need to be worn – instead practice effective hand hygiene.

Hand hygiene should be performed often, including at the following times:

- After touching surfaces (eg. doorbells, door handles, lift buttons)
- Before and after contact with residents (including provision of a face mask for use)
- After touching a resident's items or surroundings
- Before putting on and after taking off personal protective equipment (e.g. surgical mask)
- Before and after eating
- After going to the toilet
- Before preparing food

Alcohol-based hand rub should NEVER be applied to gloves.

Avoid touching your face. If you must touch your face, perform hand hygiene before and after doing so.

Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette

Ensure you use respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette at all times. This means coughing or sneezing into your inner elbow or a tissue. Put used tissues immediately into a bin and perform hand hygiene.

Always avoid touching your face.

Experiencing COVID19 symptoms or feeling unwell

Do not attend for work if you feel unwell or have any of the following COVID-19 symptoms:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Shortness of breath
- Fever or chills

If you are at work and start to experience the above symptoms or feel unwell, advise your manager, leave immediately and return to your home. Seek testing for COVID-19 as soon as possible – see below.

Mandatory COVID19 testing

Contractors are to be tested for COVID19 as soon as possible if they are:

- Experiencing any of the above symptoms
- Feeling unwell
- Have been in the presence of a person with COVID19 without use of a face mask and gloves/appropriate hand hygiene.

Contractors are to self isolate at home until receiving the test results. If the test results are negative, and you are feeling well enough to work, you may return to work at public housing properties. If the test results are positive, you are to follow the advice provided by medical professionals. You may only return to work once you have received written confirmation from a medical professional that you are no longer a risk of transmitting COVID19 and are fit to return to work. The written confirmation is to be provided to the department contract manager, and you may only return to work on receipt of written confirmation from the department contract manager.

Voluntary precautionary COVID19 testing

If you do not meet the criteria for Mandatory COVID19 testing (outlined in the section above), it is still recommended that contractors working in public housing properties undertake regular voluntary COVID19 testing.

In doing so, you are not required to self isolate while you wait for the test results, and can continue working at public housing properties while you await the test results.

Occupational violence and aggression (OVA)

Occupational violence and aggression (OVA) is never acceptable. OVA is when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in a situation related to their work. This includes yelling, swearing, calling names, spitting, grabbing, hitting, punching, threats of violence, threats with weapons, indecent and sexual assault. If any of this behaviour happens to you while at a department site, and/or you feel unsafe at any time, withdraw and contact the department contract manager immediately and/or the police on 000.

Other important points

- Wear warm, comfortable clothing for weather conditions. Be aware of potential hypothermia symptoms such as numbness in hands/fingers or uncontrollable shivering.
- Keep an eye on how you are feeling. Keep an eye out for others and yourself for any changes to behaviour or signs of distress.
- Take regular breaks where possible. Take rest breaks off your feet where possible and be aware of your postures. Stay hydrated, eat well.
- Report any health, safety and wellbeing issues/concerns/incidents to the department contract manager and your own manager.

Keeping you safe after work

When you finish work, do hand hygiene protocols and go straight home. When you arrive home maintain physical distance to household members until you have done the following;

- Leave shoes outside/in a separate area
- Do hand hygiene protocol again
- Remove clothes and machine wash them using the highest temperature the fabric will tolerate
- Wash hands again and
- Have a shower straight away

Self-monitor for any COVID-19 symptoms and if they appear, get tested and isolate until results are received.