



Apartment Living & COVID-19 Best Practice Guideline

COMMITTEES

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease spread between people who are in close contact (1.8m or less) with one another. Apartment buildings and other shared living spaces pose the potential risk of an infected resident spreading the virus to other residents - also known as community spread.

Whether you're a landlord, owner occupier, committee or a building owner, here's what you need to know about preparedness, communication and resident safety during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Business Continuity and Pandemic Planning

You may already have a Business Continuity Plan but that is not enough for managing a Pandemic. A pandemic has the potential to disrupt workforces, supply chains and economic activity in the months ahead – expect for at least 6 months. So, it is with a sense of urgency that you need to review and update your business continuity plans to ensure their operational resiliency. Modelling suggests that you should plan for at least 40% of your workforce to not be capable of work; either having contracted the virus or it being necessary for them to support other family members who have contracted the virus.

To protect your workforce and help ensure its continued productivity, it is critical to:

- » Establish a strategy that enables employees to continue to function without endangering them. This may mean employees work from home. You need to ascertain if they have all the right equipment – computer, screens, suitable chair, internet coverage and band width and a safe working environment. You can utilise this [working from home policy template](#)¹ as well as this [working from home checklist](#)¹ to help develop a strategy.
- » Have a plan to ensure social distancing of employees during working hours and to isolate employees should the threat of possible infection arise.
- » Identify how you will protect staff if you continue with face to face meetings.
- » Verify that you have the tools, technology, capacity, and security measures in place to support a large remote workforce.
- » Review your Human Resource policies to ensure employees will not be personally impacted if they must be quarantined for an extended period and modify any policies as appropriate to give greater flexibility to normal working arrangements.
- » Determine your priorities and the minimum staffing requirements to support these priorities, in case you need to function with a significantly reduced workforce.
- » Identify key employees and ensure other staff members have received appropriate training to comprehensively cover their absence.

- » Create a communications plan that includes providing employees and other stakeholders with regular situation updates as well as actions taken. Start this now if you haven't already.
- » Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your value chains.
- » Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (suppliers, vendors, service providers, etc.).
- » Identify single points of failure in your business environment.
- » Start your recession planning now.

Footnote 1

For Victoria Members

SCA (VIC) is a member of VCCI and has provided these VCCI templates as a member benefit. As an SCA (VIC) Member, you may be eligible for a discount of 50% to avail your company of more business benefits offered by VCCI, subject to terms and conditions set by the Victorian Chamber of Commerce.)

For other members

Contact your local Business Chamber of Commerce to find out what documentation you may be able to gain access to assist your business.

Strata Meetings

Some Companies have already made the decision to defer Annual General Meetings (AGM) or move to online technology to conduct meetings, although may be doing so with some risk.

As the number of cases of coronavirus increases across the country, and as Government advises more details on social distancing, each Owners Corporations will need to consider whether there are risk factors which would lend themselves to a cancellation or a postponement of an AGM, such as;

- » Demographics and vulnerability of the attendees,
- » The presence of confirmed or presumptive cases of coronavirus in the community;
- » The ability to arrange for social distancing in the venue of choice;
- » The expected volume of attendees at the AGM.

When it is all said and done, some meetings may be considered a low risk and you may decide to proceed as planned. If so then your risk management should start with a COVID-19 Notice to be included in the meeting pack and for display at the meeting venue.

SCA across Australia and New Zealand is liaising with Government to provide exemptions and directives where the current circumstances will impact on compliance with legislative obligations, during this challenging time; including AGMs being required to be held within 15 months of the last, any important decisions that require the affixing of the common seal and therefore witnessing of its application and reliability of management clauses and impending expiration.

Refer to [Guidance note](#) from Lavan Legal regarding holding General Meetings in the Covid Era.

2020 Covid-19 Meeting Procedures

GENERAL:

If you have

1. Any symptoms – if you are at all unwell – please do not attend the meeting.
2. Travelled overseas in the last fortnight and/or been in contact with anyone who has, please do not attend the meeting.
3. Been in contact with anyone who has contracted the virus please do not attend the meeting.

Instead, please attend by proxy or by electronic means (where this is possible – *more on this below*).

Before the Meeting: All attendees are requested to thoroughly wash their hands.

AT THE MEETING:

- (a) Everyone must fully and carefully wash their hands with the sanitizer when they register for the meeting.
- (b) Absolutely No Handshakes! Please use elbow or forearm bumps or just smile & nod.
- (c) No sharing of pens or documents or anything else at the meeting.
- (d) Where possible: Keep one empty chair or more between attendees.
- (e) The chair may adjourn the meeting at any time if the chair has any concern for the health of the attendees of the meeting.

We reserve the right to postpone the meeting at any time, if we see any potential health concerns for owners attending the meeting. Dependent upon all the circumstances, if the meeting has been adjourned, we may investigate the possibility of holding the meeting by “skype” or similar platform – thereby allowing all owners to attend online. If arranged, we will provide notice of such to all owners.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation..

Apartment Living and COVID-19 for Committees

Introduction

With a large percentage of the population already living or working in a Strata Community the chances are high that you will have someone already in self-quarantine or who has tested positive for COVID-19, living in your complex. It is also likely that this Pandemic will be around for some months yet.

As our community moves to lockdown, our building occupancy will be at capacity. Our buildings include all age groups, and everyone will be home for some weeks. During this time, we need to be tolerant, considerate of others and kind to each other.

Besides increasing hygiene measures and having a building-wide plan in place, it is critical to consider suspending social gatherings, such as meet and greets, apartment complex meetings, or other activities in the building that require people to gather.

Copies of the Department of Health's advertisements for stopping the spread of the virus can be found online. These can be printed and put up in common areas around the property.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-print-ads-simple-steps-to-stop-the-spread>

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

Are residents required to disclose to the Strata Community if they are self-quarantined or infected?

At this stage it is unknown if the Health Department intends to notify a Strata Community if it has issued a notice to a person to quarantine.

However, SCA recommends all residents and their visitors undertake best practice to provide a duty not cause a hazard or interfere with quiet enjoyment.

Recommendation 1:

Health, safety and security of lot owners, occupiers of lots and others

A lot owner or occupier must not use the lot, or permit it to be used, so as to cause a hazard to the health, safety and security of an owner, occupier, or user of another lot.

Recommendation 2:

Behaviour of owners, occupiers and invitees on common property

An owner or occupier of a lot must take all reasonable steps to ensure that guests of the owner or occupier do not behave in a manner likely to unreasonably interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of any other person entitled to use the common property.

What should we do if we are advised that someone is self-isolating or has contracted the infection?

If you are notified or become aware, you must keep the identity and specific location confidential and only disclose to parties that need to know. The parties that need to know are:

» Any contractors who service the site

This allows them to increase their own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols. They only need to know specific details if they are providing a behind the door service.

» The Strata Community Manager and Building Manager as applicable

They should be advised of which apartment in case something needs to be escalated.

» Residents

Place a notice on the bulletin board advising that a case has been reported. Do not provide private and confidential information. It can be just a general notice, confirming the presence of a case and to adhere to published health guidelines.

» Affected Resident

Provide details to the resident concerned as to what they must do with respect to delivery, visitors, rubbish and any other property restrictions.

What should we do about complaints?

Enforcing the Rules is a Committee responsibility but during extreme circumstances such as these, where building occupancy will be at maximum and everyone living in close quarters a Committee should act reasonably and consider carefully practical solutions to keep community harmony.

Some Rule enforcement like drying the washing on the balcony, tolerance of “quiet enjoyment” and pets may need to be relaxed. Common sense should be used.

So, what does this mean for you as the Committee?

The Committee is the designated representative of all the owners (and by default residents) that live in your development. You are responsible for the health and safety of your residents on behalf of the Strata Community.

At this stage there is very little published by the Health Department as to any specific obligations a building owner has when providing shelter to a person with or suspected to have COVID-19. However, the Government has introduced new containment measures for social distancing as well as for non-essential services that includes pools and gyms. Committees should now close all pools and gyms within Strata Communities.

SCA as the peak industry body for the strata industry has consulted with several professional organisations to develop this guide for Committees.

If you have a Building Manager request a copy of their Pandemic Management Plan.

If you do not have a Building Manager, you will together with your Strata Community Manager (if applicable), need to develop your own Pandemic Management Plan.

To do this you will need to:

- » Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your development. For example, greater parcel delivery, more visitors and impact of financial reserves.
- » Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (Fire, Pool, Cleaning, Waste removal etc.) as these services may be affected.
- » Create a communication platform to inform residents. This could be as simple as a daily or weekly bulletin in the lobby or using technology platforms.
- » List the common areas most at risk for contamination and put in a management strategy for each area. For example, some things to think about are:

You will remain responsible for management of contractors visiting the site; however you are advised to not directly approach contractors.

If you have a Strata Community Manager, they will continue to organise your Contractors via official work orders. It may be necessary to delay non-essential work/activities on-site, however this will be done in consultation with the Committee as and when required.

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p>POOL</p> <p>Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 close the pool</p>	<p>Inform users:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That use of pool is at their own risk • To shower before use • Stay in their apartment if they don't feel well. • Implement social distancing with other users • Sit on their own towels • Wipe sweat with a disposable paper towel, dispose of correctly and wash their hands after. • Exercise social distancing • Increase cleaning schedule <p>Consider closing the facilities; be guided by Government advice.</p>	<p>Create a sign or multiple signs and place around Pool area notifying residents of established protocols</p> <p>Notify residents of and reasons for closure and affix signs advising of same.</p>
<p>BBQ & COMMUNITY AREA</p> <p>Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 close the area</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Consider closure of the facility</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p> <p>Notify residents of protocols established for use.</p> <p>And/or notify residents of and reasons for closure, if this decision is made. Affix signs to advise of protocols established or closure of facility.</p>
<p>TOILET & SHOWERS</p> <p>Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Consider shutting down the facilities</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p> <p>Notify residents of protocols established and reason for same. Affix signs in area of facility.</p>
<p>LIFT ACCESS</p> <p>Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 increased social distancing requirements</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements.</p>
<p>INTERCOM SYSTEM</p> <p>Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 increased social distancing requirements</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request in interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p>

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p>LAUNDRY AREAS Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 increased social distancing requirements</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule Mandatory hot wash</p>	<p>Create a sign or multiple signs and place around Laundry to wash their hands before and after using laundry facility, to use detergent and hot water wash and recommend using the dryer to finish.</p> <p>Consider hand sanitizer in room, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements. A booking system could be implemented to regulate numbers.</p>
<p>FRONT DOOR Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange increased cleaning regime; to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate.</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements.</p>
<p>DOOR HANDLES Surface Contamination</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning to at least daily, or more if a high use, are with increased risk of higher infection rate.</p>
<p>VENTILATION/AIR CONDITIONING Airborne contaminants</p>	<p>Check if HEPA filters, consider upgrade if not</p>	<p>Review ventilation rates – increase fresh air rates if possible.</p>
<p>COMMITTEE MEETINGS Surface contaminants Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 increased social distancing requirements</p>	<p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Wipe down tables, chairs etc. before and after use of committee meeting area</p> <p>Request a Committee Member not attend if they have travelled overseas recently, been in contact with someone who has, or has been in contact with someone who has contracted the virus or is known to have symptoms or has the virus themselves.</p> <p>Consider alternative means of communicating to make decisions.</p>	<p>Notify Committee members of the protocols established and request they comply.</p> <p>Consider alternative meeting solutions like Skype, ZOOM or telephone for discussion then use email ballots to capture decisions and create record.</p>

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p>GENERAL MEETINGS</p> <p>Surface contaminants</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 23/3/2020 increased social distancing requirements</p>	<p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Wipe down tables, chairs etc. before and after use of meeting area.</p> <p>Request Members not attend if they have travelled overseas recently, been in contact with someone who has, or has been in contact with someone who has contracted the virus or is known to have symptoms or has the virus themselves.</p> <p>Consider alternative means of communication and decision making.</p> <p>Consider deferring meeting.</p>	<p>Notify all lot owners of protocols established and request they comply.</p> <p>Consider other solutions like Skype, ZOOM, Voting on-line platforms, postal ballots etc</p> <p>Refer to Guidance note from Lavan Legal regarding holding General Meetings in the Covid Era.</p>
<p>PLUMBING</p>	<p>Use of substitute paper products as toilet paper eg Newspaper, tissues or serviettes is to be discouraged</p> <p>Potential blockages, increasing health concerns and access to services</p>	<p>Convey concerns to all residents of potential problems and how it will impact them and ask them to comply.</p> <p>Notify contractors you will need to engage to fix problems that arise. There is a high risk to a plumber who must clear blocked sewer pipe. Needs to be advised if there is a positive case.</p>
<p>CONTRACTORS</p> <p>Safe worksite</p>	<p>Responsibility to maintain a safe worksite when contractors are engaged to work on the common property.</p> <p>Maintain social distancing from contractors working on site.</p> <p>Potential threat of coming into contact with the virus.</p>	<p>Committee to avoid contact or approaching trades persons when on site.</p> <p>Work orders to be issued by Committee or OC management company; continue to require Safe Work Method Statements, which will now include additional processes including PPE and social distancing measures.</p> <p>Instruct all trades to operate as if someone with COVID-19 resides on site.</p> <p>If the OC is notified of a person who has tested positive to the virus all contractors must be notified.</p>

SCA Ltd wish to acknowledge and thank SCA (VIC) for their contribution in the development of this best practice guideline.

This publication is only a guide. Readers should make and rely on their own expert enquiries. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the material and no liability for negligence or otherwise is assumed by SCA, its servants or agents in any way connected with this publication.

© Strata Community Association 2020. The use of this publication is approved and recommended by SCA, which is the owner of the copyright. Unauthorised reproduction in whole or in part is an infringement of copyright.

Please visit [Government Websites](#) for regular updates.

Government Information – Useful Links

COVID-19 Government Updates

These sites will link you to the latest Coronavirus news, updates and advice from government agencies

Australian Government

<https://www.australia.gov.au/>

New Zealand Government

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/>

Find out what actions your local community, employers and organisations can take to help reduce the risk of infection and slow the spread of coronavirus:

NSW

<https://preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

VIC

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

QLD

<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19>

WA

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/coronavirus-covid-19>

ACT

<https://health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

SA

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet>

TAS

https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/infectious_diseases/coronavirus

NT

<https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/>

For up to date information on the Government's financial support for businesses:

Australia

<https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus>

NZ

<https://covid19.govt.nz/government-actions/financial-support>

Prime Minister Media Updates

All federal government media releases, interviews and transcripts can be found here:

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media>

Environmental cleaning and disinfection principles for COVID-19

Information regarding routine environmental cleaning and good practice can be found [here](#).

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/environmental-cleaning-and-disinfection-principles-for-covid-19.pdf>

What you need to know about coronavirus (COVID-19)

Find out what you need to know about the coronavirus [here](#).

- [What is COVID-19](#)
- [Symptoms](#)
- [How to seek medical attention](#)
- [Testing](#)
- [Self-isolation \(self-quarantine\)](#)
- [Protect yourself and others](#)
- [Social distancing](#)
- [Who is most at risk](#)
- [How it spreads](#)
- [Resources](#)

Apartment Living and COVID-19

March 2020