



Coronavirus:

Working from Home Arrangements during Pandemic

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DoE is committed to maximising everyone's wellbeing and safety at this time. These guidelines are designed to give principals/managers guidance on considering working from home arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic, recognising that these arrangements may not be considered ideal under normal circumstances.

Working from home is not a right, but in this current environment a pragmatic and empathetic approach will be applied to requests, taking into account the need to physically undertake duties at the workplace and operational requirements. Accordingly, approval from the principal/manager is to be obtained prior to commencing a work from home arrangement. The completed [WFH Agreement](#) and [WH&S & IT Checklist](#) must have been completed, assessed and approved by the principal/manager before the arrangement commences.

These guidelines have been developed to address the specific circumstances of the current pandemic and will only be applicable for the duration of the pandemic. They recognise that some additional flexibility may be required when considering working from home requests, particularly from those in vulnerable (at risk) categories.

The existing Working from Home Guidelines will not apply during the pandemic however current working from home agreements can continue to apply.

Principals and managers are likely to receive additional requests from staff to work from home and as the pandemic situation progresses it may be necessary for work sites to consider more widespread working from home arrangements. These guidelines are designed to address both these circumstances.

Specific pandemic related considerations

During the pandemic principals/managers should give particular consideration to working from home requests from staff:

- who have been directed to self-isolate by the Director of Public Health
- considered to be vulnerable (at a higher risk) if exposed to COVID-19. Current Public Health advice is that it appears people who are at higher risk of severe illness (vulnerable) if exposed to COVID-19 are those who are:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions;
 - People 60 years and older with chronic medical conditions. Conditions included in the definition of 'chronic medical conditions' will be refined as more evidence emerges. The most current list can be accessed on the Department of Health [website](#);

- People 70 years and older; and
- People with compromised immune systems (see Department of Health [website](#)).

DoE also recognises that the following groups of people may also be at a higher risk (vulnerable) including people who:

- have underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic lung condition, kidney failure
- are pregnant and their obstetrician has recommended precautions regarding current duties
- are primary carers and live with someone in the above categories.

The strong advice of National Cabinet is that people aged 70 and older, people aged 60 and over with underlying health conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions, and those with compromised immune systems should stay home and self-isolate for their own protection. On this basis, employees in these categories are not to attend work unless they provide evidence of medical clearance to do so. All attempts should be made to accommodate working from home arrangements for employees in these categories. Where normal duties cannot be undertaken from home, consideration is to be given to allocating alternative duties or partial duties wherever possible. Where it is not possible to put in place a working from home arrangement, employees will need to be informed they are not to attend the workplace, and they will continue to be paid normal salary.

Principals and site managers should continue to work with other recognised vulnerable employees (those with chronic health conditions (as confirmed by medical advice), and those who are pregnant (with an obstetrician recommending precautions on current duties), to assess appropriate options. Where working from home is possible this should be supported in the first instance. Where working from home is not possible, the employee will need to access existing accrued leave entitlements.

A legitimate consideration for principals/managers is whether the working from home agreement will minimise the risk for all employees in the workplace by reducing the number of employees at a workplace at any given time and therefore increasing the opportunity for social distancing.

Principles

Applications to work from home should be considered on a case by case basis and are subject to the following principles:

- The employee's duties do not require them to be physically present at the worksite;
- The majority of the employee's duties can be undertaken effectively at home or reasonable adjustments to those duties can be made, or alternative duties allocated, without impacting operational requirements or service delivery;
- There is adequate support for the employee to enable ongoing contact and inclusion in the team
- The [Working from Home Agreement](#) enables:
 - Adequate communication channels with colleagues and the principal/manager
 - Appropriate monitoring arrangements; and
 - Mitigation of any WHS risks identified in the completed [WH&S & IT Checklist](#).

Requirements & Responsibilities

- The [Working from Home Agreement](#) is to be completed and signed by the Principal/Manager and employee.
- Arrangements should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are working and are not negatively impacting operational requirements or service delivery.
- The principal/manager can withdraw or change the working from home agreement at any time if it is not working or the operational needs of the workplace change.
- Working from home arrangements under these guidelines will be time limited (as may be needed to meet the individual's circumstances up to a maximum of 1 month) and subject to regular review.
- Employees should work within standard hours unless otherwise agreed with their principal/manager and will not ordinarily accrue flex time credits or be eligible for overtime where relevant.
- Employees must ensure they are available for communication with their principal/manager and team during standard hours and maintain regular communication with the workplace.

Where the working from home request does not meet these principles, the principal/manager and employee should discuss alternative arrangements. Such alternatives would include continuing to attend the usual workplace, considering an alternative workplace, or utilising accrued paid leave or leave without pay.

Procedure for approving requests

Principals/managers are responsible for considering and approving the working from home requests and any liaison with the employee. The following procedure applies:

- Principal/Manager and Employee must complete and sign the [Working From Home Agreement](#);
- Employees must complete the [WH&S & IT Checklist](#) and provide it to the principal/manager prior to commencing working from home;
- Principals/managers must sign the completed [WH&S & IT Checklist](#) to confirm acceptance; and
- Approved [Working From Home Agreements](#) are to be retained in the workplace for future reference.

Employees who become ill while working from home are required to notify their manager and the normal arrangements for accessing personal leave apply.

Government Network Capacity and Staying Cyber Safe

Widespread working from home arrangements will put an increased load on the DoE Network and priority must be given to ensuring continuation of critical functions. Therefore, employees working from home are to:

- When connected to the network, use teleconference instead of videoconferencing where possible.
- Be responsible for:
 - cybersecurity, for example being mindful of clicking on suspicious links;

- o applying the same privacy principles in dealing with personal information as in the workplace; and
- o ensuring no one else at home is able to access the employee's DoE device.

Employees should familiarise themselves with:

- [Working from Home Guide – Government Network Capacity](#)
- [Working from Home Guide – Staying Cyber Safe](#)

Costs incurred

Employees should claim 'home office expenses' through their individual tax deductions and returns. The ATO has provided specific messaging with respect to employees now working from home as a result of COVID-19 and further information can be found [here](#).

Employees who are suffering financial hardship as a result of COVID-19 should speak to their Manager or email HRCovid-19@education.tas.gov.au for further advice.

Site Closures

In the event of site closures, principals/managers should attempt to support employees working from home in the first instance.

What is the best HR contact point?

Please ring the HR Hotline on 61 65 5649 or email HRCovid-19@education.tas.gov.au for further advice with any of the above or other employee work-related questions.