

Guidelines for 'on farm' quarantine of PLS and SWP workers in Queensland

This option involves allowing workers recruited under the Australian Government's Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) by Approved Employers in Queensland to work while quarantining in accommodation 'on farm'.

It would be limited to workers originating from those PLS and SWP countries that have the lowest COVID-19 risk profile, (i.e. reliable testing regime/capacity, and low number of known cases), and subject to arrangements to minimise the risk of exposure to travellers from other nations en route to Queensland.

If these pre-conditions are met, the COVID-19 community transmission risk posed by these workers would be not much greater than seasonal workers already present in Queensland.

Observing a 14-day period of 'on farm' quarantine from the general community would address the residual risk. Due to the comparatively low COVID-19 risks posed by these workers, any quarantine breaches would pose a much lower risk compared to quarantine breaches by international arrivals in standard hotel quarantine.

Risks for seasonal workers generally are currently managed under the *Seasonal Workers Health Management Plans Direction*. Specifically, employers and transport and accommodation providers must have a health management plan that meets the Chief Health Officer's requirements.

Pre-travel and travel to Queensland

1. Workers must be recruited from a country which Queensland's Chief Health Officer is satisfied has a low COVID-19 risk profile, (e.g. reliable testing regime/capacity, and low number of known cases). Workers must have been in that country for 14 days or more immediately prior to traveling to Queensland.

Note the risk profile of some Pacific Island nations is being assessed by the Communicable Disease Network Australia and its findings will be considered for endorsement by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). For the purpose of these Guidelines, an AHPPC-endorsed risk assessment is not a pre-condition for Queensland's Chief Health Officer being satisfied a country has a low COVID-19 risk profile. At the time these guidelines were developed there were no countries which had been endorsed as low risk by the AHPPC.

2. A worker may not travel if they: have COVID-19; have previously had COVID-19; have symptoms consistent with COVID-19; have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days; or have been outside the country they have been recruited from in the past 14 days.

Note that pre-boarding requirements currently apply to international flights, including a questionnaire and temperature checks.

3. Workers must travel direct from the recruitment country to Queensland either on dedicated flights, (e.g. chartered for this purpose) or flights that are only transporting passengers boarding from the recruitment country, (e.g. not boarding additional passengers in that country on a flight that originated elsewhere).

Direct travel will ensure workers do not transit through airports in third countries where the COVID-19 risk is higher. Dedicated charter flights would generally be preferable to minimise this risk of contact with persons who have recently been in higher COVID-19 risk countries. Workers recruited by several different Approved Employers may be on the same charter flight.

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4. There may be restrictions on the arrival airport.

Arriving in Queensland at a regional airport may minimise the potential for contact with international travellers from higher COVID-19 risk countries and deliver workers closer to the quarantine place. However, currently the Queensland Police Service border arrangements only extend to Brisbane and Cairns international airports, and Queensland Health may have limited capacity to process arrivals at regional airports. Before making travel arrangements, Approved Employers should confirm that these agencies have capacity to support arrivals at a particular regional airport on the date proposed.

Note also that the approval of the National Passenger Processing Committee (NPPC), a Commonwealth Government body, is required for international flights with more than 10 travellers arriving at all Queensland airports except Brisbane and Cairns. Applications must be submitted 10 business days before the flight. More information is available on the website of the Australian Border Force: <https://www.abf.gov.au/entering-and-leaving-australia/aircraft-requirements>, or you can contact the NPPC at: nppc@abf.gov.au.

5. Workers must be transported directly from the airport to the quarantine place with as few stops during that journey as practicable, and without stopping in any location which would create a community transmission risk should any of these workers be a positive case. Vehicles must be toilet-equipped for longer journeys. Workers should wear masks and there should be a buffer of two empty rows of seats behind the driver, with the driver boarding last, to minimise risks to the driver. If the vehicle is required to stop, workers are to remain inside the vehicle as much as practicable and physical distancing is to be maintained while outside the vehicle.

Where a charter flight initially arrives at Brisbane or Cairns, it may be possible to reduce the need for road transport by re-boarding the workers, after their international border processing, for a further flight to a regional airport closer to the quarantine place.

Queensland Transport is able to assist with advice on road transport routes from the airport to the quarantine place that will minimise stops.

Transport providers should be pre-briefed on their role in maintaining the quarantine of the workers. The transport provider must also have a health management plan under the Seasonal Worker Health Management Plan Direction to manage the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace. This should be lodged with Queensland Health at: covid.plans@health.qld.gov.au

Quarantine period

6. Each worker should be tested for COVID-19 between arrival at the quarantine place and the third day of the quarantine period. Each worker must again be tested no earlier than the tenth day of the quarantine period and a negative result must be received for each worker in that cohort before any worker in the cohort is released from the quarantine arrangements.

If a private pathology provider or a General Practitioner is not available to undertake testing onsite, workers could be transported to a local private or public testing facility, but the Approved Employer would need to provide prior notice and confirm the capacity and willingness of the facility to undertake the tests. Discussion with the Local Disaster Management Group is recommended.

7. The quarantine period (including quarantine 'on farm') generally ends after whichever is the latest of:
 - 14 days from the date of arrival in Queensland; or
 - receipt of negative results for COVID-19 tests conducted on all workers in the cohort no earlier than the tenth day after the date of their arrival in Queensland.
8. However, if one or more workers in a cohort contracts COVID-19 during the quarantine period, then the quarantine period is extended for the remaining workers of the cohort until whichever is the latest of:

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- 14 days from the date the last COVID-19 positive worker was isolated away from the other workers in the cohort; or
- receipt of negative results for COVID-19 tests conducted on all the other workers in the cohort no earlier than the tenth day after the date the last COVID-19 positive worker was isolated away from them.

PLS/SWP International Quarantine Plan

9. The Approved Employer must develop a PLS/SWP International Quarantine Plan for managing the quarantine and needs of the workers for the quarantine period.

Note that this plan is distinct from the health management plan for the workplace, accommodation and transport for seasonal workers mentioned later in these Guidelines. The two plans will interact, (i.e. it must be ensured that workers in quarantine do not mix with workers that have already completed their quarantine period or other persons on the site). The plans will be assessed together so that the Chief Health Officer can consider how they interact and complement each other.

10. The relevant Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) would be consulted on the plan.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will arrange this consultation but Approved Employers are encouraged to make earlier contact. Note that regional hospital and health services may have limited capacity to deal with a surge in demand, (i.e. for testing or if a worker(s) tested positive and required treatment). Queensland Health would need to assess their capacity and understand how resources might need be mobilised. LDMGs would also be well placed to comment on capacity and the relative isolation of the quarantine place and workplace and the adequacy of the plan to address possible community concerns about the arrival of the workers.

11. The Queensland Government will only advise the Australian Government that the Approved Employer has conditional approval to recruit workers if the plan meets the Chief Health Officer's requirements, or could meet the requirements if relatively minor changes were made.
12. The plan must cover arrangements for the full quarantine period including transport to the quarantine place and how appropriate distancing will be maintained at the work place. It is desirable for the plan to detail arrangements for meeting the workers' physical, emotional and social needs as well as foreseeable cultural and religious interests.

Arrangements to accommodate workers' interests will support their mental and emotional wellbeing, and may reduce the risk of worker non-compliance with the plan.

13. The plan must also cover how the workers would be inducted into the quarantine arrangements, including translation of information where necessary.

The Approved Employer should ensure that workers, and those who may interact with them during the quarantine period, are aware of and can access interpreting and translation services and support services in language such as 'I Speak Your Language'. For example, a translator may assist in achieving compliance where a worker is displaying COVID-19 symptoms and must be given complex instructions about isolation and English is not their first language.

14. The plan must include a strategy for isolation of a patients displaying COVID-19 symptoms and/or confirmed cases of COVID-19, and for them to be seen by a medical practitioner and be safely transferred to a health facility where necessary.

Arrangements would need to include isolation of the worker from others in quarantine and appropriate care for the worker while isolated. Provision of Personal Protective Equipment must be considered. If testing onsite by a private pathology provider or a General Practitioner cannot be arranged, the quarantine plan could include arrangements

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for transporting a worker to a local private or public testing facility, but the Approved Employer must provide prior notice and confirm the capacity and willingness of the facility to undertake the test. Discussion with the Local Disaster Management Group is recommended.

15. The plan must outline measures to mitigate the risk of transmission to suppliers and service providers who may need to enter the quarantine place or work place.

For example, minimising entry by suppliers and service providers, specific entry points, entry at times when quarantined workers are not present, and provision of Personal Protective Equipment could be considered.

16. The plan must include comprehensive record keeping about the health and appropriate physical distancing of the workers during the quarantine period, including details of all health checks and COVID-19 tests undertaken and the results. Records should include details of all suppliers and service providers.

General requirements for quarantine period

17. Workers are expected to commence work while maintaining their quarantine from the broader community during the quarantine period.

The commencement of work will reduce boredom and address some mental health risks while workers are quarantined and thus cannot mix with the wider community. This may reduce the risk of worker non-compliance with the plan. Consideration should also be given to how to reduce boredom during periods of recreation.

18. Quarantine accommodation must be located at a place ('the quarantine place') at or near the place where the work will be undertaken ('the work place'). Ideally the quarantine place and the work place would be on the same farm property and the workers would remain on this property from their arrival until the completion of the 14 day quarantine. However, a quarantine plan which allowed limited movements from the property where the quarantine place is situated may be approved if the movements will not compromise quarantine requirements.

For example, movements between the quarantine place on one property and the work place on a neighbouring property are likely to be acceptable where both properties are owned by the Approved Employer and there are arrangements in place to ensure workers remain quarantined from other people, (i.e. who are not part of the same cohort) on both properties and while moving between them.

19. The quarantine place and the work place must both be away from areas that are accessed by the general community.
20. Workers must be quarantined in a cohort for the quarantine period. Workers who arrive on a flight together may form several cohorts quarantined at different quarantine places. Arrivals on separate flights must not be mixed in a cohort.
21. The Approved Employer may embed certain staff with the cohort, (e.g. as supervisors), in which case those staff should remain with the cohort until the completion of the quarantine period as if they were workers.
22. Each cohort must remain spatially separated as far as practicable from all other persons during the quarantine period, including: other cohorts of workers being quarantined under these Guidelines; other persons at the property where the quarantine place and the work place are located; and the general community.

Careful consideration must be given to maintaining workers in their cohorts. Cohorting will be critical to the successful implementation of this option.

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For example, workers must at least be in separate paddocks from other workers at a workplace. They must not share recreation areas or amenities. If this separation cannot be maintained, then all persons at the workplace will need to be placed in quarantine with the cohort of workers.

23. Security measures to ensure quarantine requirements are met (e.g. physical security measures such as fences, procedures for maintaining appropriate physical distancing from other persons on the property, and/or provision of security staff to ensure workers comply with requirements and other persons do not enter the quarantine place or the workplace), should be commensurate with the risk of contact with others. Factors such as the remoteness of the property and the number of other persons who will be present on the property would be relevant to the security measures required.

The LDMG may provide advice about local community concerns about security when commenting on a quarantine plan.

24. If, during the quarantine period, a worker or a person who has had close contact with a worker has a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, (as diagnosed by a medical practitioner), the following persons are to be notified immediately:
 - Local Public Health Unit
 - Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
 - Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Note that the requirement for a notification to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is because if a worker was quarantining on farm, (and working during this period), and was diagnosed as being COVID-19 positive, then it would be 'arising out of the conduct of the business' and 'the carrying out of work is a significant contributing factor'. The situation is different with regards to hotel quarantining.

Arrangements on arrival in Queensland

25. On arrival in Queensland, the workers will be subject to entry screening.

Screening may be conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment Biosecurity Officers (Australian Government) or Queensland Health officers and will include a questionnaire and temperature checking. These arrangements are standard for international arrivals, but resourcing would need to be mobilised, especially for flights arriving at regional airports. Early discussion about capacity to resource flights arriving at proposed dates and locations is recommended.

26. On arrival in Queensland, each worker may be issued with a quarantine notice directing them to quarantine in accordance with the directions of the Approved Employer who is responsible for implementing the plan. A translation of the health direction may be required to ensure it is understood by the workers.

The quarantine direction under the Public Health Act 2005 would be issued by officers from the Queensland Police Service or Public Health Unit. Resourcing would need to be mobilised, especially for flights arriving at regional airports. Early discussion about capacity to resource flights arriving at proposed dates and locations is recommended.

Workers may require issue of a conditional quarantine notice, allowing them to leave the place of quarantine to attend the workplace.

27. The Approved Employer may also be issued a public health notice requiring them to ensure the workers are quarantined in accordance with the plan.

At the time these Guidelines were developed, changes to a relevant Chief Health Officer Public Health Direction were being considered to empower the issue of such a notice and ensure it would be enforceable under the Public Health Act 2005.

Compliance monitoring and enforcement during the quarantine period

28. The Approved Employer is responsible for enforcing the quarantine plan.
29. The Approved Employer must immediately report any breaches of quarantine arrangements to:
 - Local Public Health Unit
 - Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
30. The quarantine plan must include consent for emergency officers under the *Public Health Act 2005* to enter the property without notice during the 14 day quarantine period to ensure the plan is being complied with and effectively enforced.

It is proposed that monitoring and enforcement would be primarily the responsibility of Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) enforcement officers who have been appointed as emergency officers under the Public Health Act 2005.

31. If the Approved Employer is not the owner or occupier of the quarantine place and/or the work place then they must ensure they can meet all the requirements of these Guidelines and their quarantine plan, including consent for entry by emergency officers.
32. Consequences of a breach of the plan could include penalties for non-compliance with a health direction under the Public Health Act 2005, possible direction of all workers to hotel quarantine for the remainder of the, or an additional 14 day, quarantine period at full cost to the approved employer and suspension of Queensland's approval to recruit further workers under PLS / SWP. Where appropriate, enforcement action may also be taken against individual workers.

Arrangements after the quarantine period and health management plans

33. The workers may move to other accommodation at the end of their quarantine period.

Every accommodation and transport provider providing services to seasonal workers must already have a health management plan under the Seasonal Worker Health Management Plan Direction to manage the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace. This should be lodged with Queensland Health at: covid.plans@health.qld.gov.au

34. The Queensland Government would support recruitment plans under this option only if the Approved Employer had lodged a suitable health management plan with Queensland Health and there was no record of non-compliance with the plan.

Every Queensland agribusiness that employs seasonal workers must already have a health management plan under the Seasonal Worker Health Management Plan Direction to manage the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace. This should be lodged with Queensland Health at: covid.plans@health.qld.gov.au. When the quarantine period for the workers is over, this plan will address the COVID-19 risks associated with the agribusiness. Monitoring compliance with health management plans would be the responsibility of DAF and WHSQ enforcement officers appointed as emergency officers under the Public Health Act 2005 as per current arrangements.

35. Any redeployment to another Approved Employer could only occur after the quarantine period, and would be subject to the other Approved Employer complying with the Seasonal Workers Health Management Plans Direction or its successor (in addition to Australian Government approvals that may be required).

Work health and safety

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36. Where directed, an Approved Employer must undergo a work health and safety systems audit and on-site hazard inspection by a Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspector before workers commence work.

Costs

37. All costs associated with this option will be the responsibility of Approved Employers.
38. The Approved Employer must arrange and meet the cost of any health checks and COVID-19 tests required, except those conducted by government agencies on arrival at the airport. The cost of health checks and COVID-19 tests forms part of the quarantine costs and cannot be recovered from workers.
39. The Approved Employer must meet the full cost of hotel quarantine if, due to a breach of the quarantine plan, workers are directed to hotel quarantine for the remainder of the quarantine period, or an additional 14 day quarantine period.
40. The Approved Employer may need to pay a charge covering some of the costs of Queensland Government support for the recruitment including, but not limited to, a charge to cover costs associated with mobilising resources for compliance monitoring during the quarantine period.