

Keeping safe: COVID-19 health and safety guidelines for vineyard workers

These guidelines have been developed to protect workers undertaking pruning and other vineyard activities from the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease. Spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 is mostly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Transmission is also possible through contact with contaminated surfaces. As such, high levels of personal hygiene, physical distancing and cleanliness of shared facilities are fundamental in minimising the risk of the virus spreading.

All businesses engaging workers have a legal obligation to ensure the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace and must follow the advice from the Department of Health and the relevant state and territory governments. Each workplace must comply with public health directions and physical distancing. It is recommended that all activity in the vineyard is documented including visitors, hygiene protocols and any illnesses or symptoms reported by employees.

Before pruning starts, all workers, including contractors, must be informed of their health and safety responsibilities. When engaging contractors, it is best practice to formalise the roles and responsibilities of the workers using a contractor induction agreement before work commences.

Worker health

Any person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or been in direct contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, should not report to work. Anyone experiencing symptoms including: high temperature, sore throat, fever or cough, must not present for work and it is recommended that they seek medical advice.

Personal hygiene

All workers should be encouraged to maintain a high level of personal hygiene, which can be encouraged using appropriate signage and the provision of washing facilities, soap and hand sanitiser.

Physical distancing

Transportation

Transport in cars should be restricted to one passenger per vehicle unless the passengers reside in the same household. Seating in buses or minivans should be restricted to maintain a 1.5 m spacing.

In the vineyard

Outdoor activities such as pruning pose a low risk of spreading COVID-19 if workers practice physical distancing. Physical distancing is a key control measure; a minimum 1.5 m buffer should be maintained between people in the vineyard at all times.

Strategies to achieve this might include:

- Consider alternatives to 'group training'. This may include pre-pruning demonstration panels which can be used as a reference by pruners and supervisors or the distribution of printed instructions or demonstration videos.
- Space pruners at least 1.5 m apart.
- If possible, schedule the timing of breaks to limit the number of workers congregating in shared indoor areas and encourage workers to use alternative areas during breaks.

Sharing tools and equipment

The risk of spreading COVID-19 increases when tools and equipment, including vehicles, are shared. Identify which equipment is usually shared by the pruning gang and look for strategies to either completely avoid or minimise sharing. For example, if heavy loppers are required, it might be feasible to nominate a single person the task of making all 'big cuts' so that the loppers are not passed from person to person. If equipment needs to be shared, ensure that disinfectant is readily available to wipe down those tools and that staff know to clean them before and after each new use. All 'high touch' surfaces (e.g. door handles, handrails, steering wheels and gearsticks) should be disinfected between users. If feasible, the use of tractors should be limited to one person to minimise risk.

Sanitation options for tools and equipment

Recommended cleaning processes and products are outlined in the Australian Grape and Wine [Cleaning and Disinfection Guidelines](#).

Maintain a clean workplace

Shared areas such as toilets and lunchrooms are high-risk zones for virus spread. Maintain a safe work environment in these areas by:

- Cleaning toilets, shared indoor spaces and high traffic areas at least daily using surface steriliser.
- Maintaining a cleaning schedule for shared areas and recording the time and name of the person responsible for cleaning.
- If lunchroom facilities are provided, requesting that employees bring their own cups and cutlery rather than providing communal supplies.
- Providing plenty of water, soap, hand towel, rubbish bins and/or hand sanitiser for maintaining personal hygiene.
- Modifying the layout of shared areas to allow for the maintenance of physical distancing.
- Using COVID-19 specific signage to highlight the risks and actions required to stop the spread of the virus. Signage can be accessed from [SafeWork Australia](#).

Disclaimer

The information provided has been collated from a number of sources and represents current best practice guidelines. It should not be interpreted as health advice. In the event of a COVID-19 infection, businesses need to cooperate with relevant government health departments.

Contact the AWRI helpdesk on 08 8313 6600 or helpdesk@awri.com.au for assistance with specific technical queries.