

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

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These guidelines have been developed to protect workers undertaking grape harvesting 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 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 harvest 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.

Record Keeping

All businesses should maintain records of everyone who has entered their sites, either through use of a written logbook or a QR code. This will assist with contact tracing in the event of a COVID-19 infection and, depending on your location, may be a government requirement.

Worker health

Any person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or has been in direct contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or has been in a location listed by the relevant state or territory health department as a COVID-19 hotspot or exposure site 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 a COVID-19 test and self-isolate until they receive their result.

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

Try to reduce the number of workers travelling together in a vehicle for work purposes. If workers are required to travel together, seating should be restricted to maintain 1.5 m spacing. In cases where physical distancing within vehicles is not possible, workers should be encouraged to wear masks. If the trip is longer than 15 minutes, air conditioning must be set to external airflow rather than to recirculation or windows should be opened for the duration of the trip. Vehicles must be cleaned following each use by workers.

In the vineyard

Outdoor activities such as grape harvesting 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:

- If training is required, consider alternatives to 'group training'. This may include the distribution of printed instructions or demonstration videos. Space grape pickers 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.

In situations where physical distancing is not possible, workers should be encouraged to wear masks.

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 grape pickers and look for strategies to either completely avoid or minimise sharing.

For example:

- Provide each picker with their own pair of sanitised picking snips (picking buckets?) to use during each shift and ensure they sanitise the snips before returning them at the end of the shift.
- Nominate a single person the task of laying out and collecting the picking bins/buckets to ensure the number of people touching the bins is kept to a minimum.

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.