General Advice on Safety

COVID-19: Resource 1

Volunteering VICTORIA

Safeguarding your volunteers: general advice on how to protect staff, volunteers and the people you serve

Volunteers are considered as 'workers' under Work Health and Safety (WHS) Laws and as such should be afforded the same considerations as a paid employee.

For information about coronavirus for employers please visit:

COVID-19 Information for Employers

COVID-19 Safe Work Australia Advice

- ## Support self-care and strong communication for volunteers

  o It is recommended that you advise/speak with your volunteers about different ways of volunteering, for example continuing to volunteer remotely.
  o If the organisation decides to suspend volunteer activities, commit to staying in regular contact with volunteers to keep them updated on latest developments
  o You may have some volunteers that also require support, try to establish mechanisms where they can continue to have the social connection they may have received through volunteering.

- ## Share the latest information from trusted authorities:

  o Use all your communication channels to provide clear information from trusted sources.
  Utilise posters and emails to promote

hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. **Volunteering Tasmania has shared some resources here**

- ## Promote social distance:

  o Encourage staff and volunteers to keep a social distance of 1.5 metres from one another. Promote handshake free meetings – people can wave and verbally great each other instead. Hold virtual meetings when possible.

- ## When should volunteers not deliver services:

  o When they have travelled or have been in contact with someone who has travelled overseas recently
  o If they have been in close contact with someone infected with COVID-19
  o If they are unwell or have an acute respiratory infection (cold/flu, sinus etc)

You can assess the risk of infection to your staff, volunteers and clients by using the **Self-Assessment Tool – COVID-19 Fact Sheet** provided by the Victorian Government.

- ## Set strict expectations on unwell staff and volunteers:

  o Communicate clearly the need for all unwell staff to stay at home. If a team member who is unwell comes into the office, ensure that they go home and seek medical attention if needed.

- ## Offer handwashing facilities:

  o Handwashing facilities should be available and well supplied. Provide

soap, hand sanitiser, tissues and cleaning products around your buildings for staff, volunteers, clients and visitors.

- **Schedule cleaning regimes:**
  - o Frequently clean key areas including keyboards, desks and door handles.

- **Support your team working from home:**
  - o It may be possible for your staff and volunteers to voluntarily work from home. This may also become required, particularly if impacted if school closures come into effect. Consideration should be given to the infrastructure, equipment and processes needed to allow your team to work remotely. These could include secure, remote access to your files, video conferencing and telephone facilities and guidance on working from home safely.

- **Protect vulnerable groups:**
  - o If your organisation works with people with weakened immune systems, older people, those with disabilities or those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease, it's important that you plan to limit their risk to being exposed.
  - o Consider time off for vulnerable volunteers and those who are understandably concerned about their health.

- **Cancel or postpone any public events or mass gatherings:**

  - o As per Federal Government instructions, all gatherings of more than 500 people should not go ahead. You should also consider the viability of your smaller events, including training, as you do not want to put anyone at unnecessary risk. You may find it more suitable to postpone your event to a later date.

- **Hold meetings via video or tele conferencing:**
  - o Utilise video or tele conferencing for internal and external meetings, including board and committee meetings.

- **Review travel risks and arrangements:**
  - o Consider if travel is necessary. Maintain updated and clear advice for staff and volunteers travelling.
  - o Smartraveller.gov.au provides Australians with the latest information and advice for safe travel overseas.

- **Look after physical and mental health and wellbeing:**
  - o If your team is working from home encourage them to be physically active during the day and to stay in touch with their colleagues through email, phone and social media (as appropriate).
  - o Support staff and volunteers to look after their mental wellbeing. Remind them to take time to switch off from all things COVID-19 and focus on things they can control.

- **Record key contacts:**
  - Ensure all emergency contact details are up to date.

- **Be prepared at home:**
  - Recommend staff and volunteers have two weeks' supply of food and medication on hand for all residents and pets. Encourage being prepared, discourage panic buying.

Stay informed

We hope this has given you a starting point for planning your COVID-19 response. We encourage you to continue to follow health and safety guidelines as advised by appropriate and relevant authorities:

- Victorian Government Public Health website
- Australian Government Department of Health website
- World Health Organisation website

References + Credit: Thank you to Volunteering Queensland and Volunteering Tasmania for their support in developing this resource & information gained from NCVO (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations).

Also see Volunteering Victoria COVID-19 page
All resources available online.