

13 August 2021

Dear Mine Operator,

RE: COVID-19 update – August 2021

During the current COVID-19 outbreak there have been circumstances where mines have needed to enact their COVID-19 protocols.

To date, at least four mines in regional locations have needed to respond to instances of a worker being on site who has received a positive test result or being notified they are a close contact.

Large mining operations in regional locations will face significant challenges in effectively managing a COVID-19 incident, particularly where the workforce contains large numbers of “drive in, drive out” workers.

There are any number of scenarios that mines will have to potentially manage, however there has been some similarities in the four incidents to date. The two most problematic scenarios are either a person who is on site gets notified they have tested positive to COVID-19, or a person on site receives notification they have been identified as a close contact.

In the situation where a mine worker who has tested positive is on site, or has been on site, the mine must contact NSW Health to determine what actions need to be taken. Some of the things mine sites need to consider in their COVID-19 contingency plans are:

- Workers who had a COVID-19 test on the basis they are symptomatic must self-isolate in accordance with health directions.
- Workers who are notified of a positive test result, whether on site or not, need to report the notification to their manager as soon as possible upon receipt.
- In the instance of a report of a positive case, how the mine will assist NSW Health to identify all people who will be classified as close contacts and how these workers are tested and isolated for the 14 days as required by the Public Health Orders. Consider issues such as the location of a worker's residence, accommodation sharing, car-pooling arrangements and so on.

- The implementation of procedures to quickly and safely isolate work groups to prevent potential further spreading of the virus where a worker with a positive test result is on site.
- Arrangements to effectively control entry and exit to site while parts of the mine or groups of workers are subject to temporary isolation.
- The provision of sustenance and temporary accommodation in the event the requirement to isolate workers is prolonged.
- Maintaining adequate stocks of appropriate cleaning supplies on site to complete any deep cleaning that is required. Deep cleaning should be carried out by personnel who are appropriately trained to undertake the task.
- The establishment of designated areas or zones that can be classified as “clean zones” for external agencies (eg NSW Health) to utilise, which are segregated from the normal operating areas of the mine.
- How workers will safely return home or to accommodation following potentially extended periods at work, considering journey distances and the availability of other services including buses etc during the current outbreak.
- Ongoing requirements to maintain a safe working environment for all workers on the site during a COVID-19 related incident, including any inspections that may be needed.
- The provision of meaningful EAP and support services to assist affected workers.
- Communication protocols that inform workers, their families and the local community about the mine’s response to a COVID-19 incident at the site in an accurate and timely manner.
- Liaison with local emergency services, the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) and other service providers (e.g. transport and bus companies) to ensure a mutual understanding of how all parties will respond in the event of a COVID-19 incident at the site.
- Rehearsal and testing of contingency plans.

Where a person who is classified as a close contact has attended a site the mine should follow the advice of NSW Health and assist the worker, if necessary, to ensure they are tested and isolated in consideration of the previous points.

Anyone who has been in contact with a notified close contact is classified as a secondary close contact. Secondary close contacts must also be identified, have a COVID-19 test and isolate until they receive a negative result.

The likelihood that a mine site is completely shut down for a close contact compared to a positive COVID-19 case is considered lower, however mines must be prepared for the possibility that a close contact or secondary contact returns a positive result to the COVID-19 test.

We are aware that the current situation with the declaration of stay at home orders is extremely dynamic, and there are implications for mine operators in terms of trying to manage the risk to their workers and comply with the requirements of Public Health Orders.

The Resources Regulator is liaising with NSW Health to ensure that relevant and practical advice can be provided to mine operators to assist with the management of COVID-19 risk, and compliance with the Public Health Orders.

Should you require any further information or assistance please call 1300 814 609 or visit the [COVID-19 page](#) on our website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leigh Nicholls', written in a cursive style.

Leigh Nicholls
Chief Inspector of Mines,
Resources Regulator