



## COVID-19 – Welfare Centre Guidelines (Oct 2020)

**Aim:** To provide guidance to Department of Communities (Communities) staff and other key agencies in managing welfare centres, whilst mitigating COVID-19 risks to the community.

It is acknowledged the ever-changing COVID-19 situation restricts the provision of specific advice however this document provides recommendations and considerations to assist local planning.

To ensure the relevancy and currency of the information contained within this document, review will occur on a continuous basis.

For the purposes of this guide, the term **Welfare Centre** will refer to both welfare and evacuation centres.

### Evacuation Planning

Welfare Centres should be considered as a transit area, with all attendees encouraged to move on to other evacuation/accommodation options where possible.

Under a COVID-19 lens, the recommended approach in an evacuation situation is listed below, however **preservation of life is to always be the priority**:

- 1 • Travellers, visitors and tourists to leave the evacuation area **if safe to do so**
- 2 • Shelter in Place **if safe to do so**
- 3 • Shelter with family and friends **if safe to do so**
- 4 • Utilise commercial/alternative accommodation options **if available**
- 5 • Use welfare centres as a last resort

It is recognised implementing this approach may not be possible in a cyclone event.

### Locally Driven Response

Department of Communities District Emergency Service Officer's develop Local Emergency Welfare Plan's (LEWP) in consultation with the Local and District Emergency Management Committee (LEMC/DEMC). These plans outline agreed emergency welfare arrangements in each local government region.

These existing Local Emergency Welfare Plans should be reviewed taking into consideration the general principles and recommendations within this guide, and current [Western Australia COVID-19 restrictions](#). Preparedness is a joint responsibility amongst



local agencies, so planning with relevant stakeholders is essential to ensure plans take into account local conditions and region-specific challenges.

To assist in planning the following approaches are recommended:

- Hazard Management Agency (HMA) to provide early advice of any potential evacuation direction to all relevant impacted agencies. This will facilitate the sharing of information and early identification of local COVID-19 risks within the proposed evacuation area
- prioritising the identification of alternate safe accommodation options for people under isolation/quarantine directions
- early determination of the level and intensity of infection control measures to be implemented within the welfare centre, based on the current Western Australia COVID-19 restrictions and phasing.

#### **HMA messaging to cover the following:**

- Emergency evacuation advice overrides COVID-19 isolation/quarantine directions
- People under an **isolation/quarantine direction** are to find alternative accommodation with family or friends who live away from the area.
  - If alternative options are unavailable and they need to attend a welfare centre, continue to follow COVID-19 precautions, maintain appropriate physical distancing, wear a mask, and identify themselves immediately on arrival.
  - When safe to do so, telephone WA Police on 131 444 to advise whereabouts
- Provide advice to the public regarding self-sufficiency of medication/scripts, specific food requirements, hygiene supplies and general COVID-19 precautions if needing to attend a welfare centre.

## **Welfare Centre Planning**

It is suggested existing **Local Emergency Welfare plans** are reviewed by relevant stakeholders, with re-evaluation of current identified facilities, using a COVID-19 lens.

Consider the following:

- maximum capacity of each facility and physical distancing requirements. Refer to facility Local Government 'COVID Safety Plan' for maximum numbers. If it appears capacity will be exceeded during an event this must be escalated to the Incident Controller.
- which facilities have capacity to allow the isolation/segregation of individuals/groups
- the layouts of facilities to identify separate entry and exit points
- the use of partitions/barriers if available/where possible
- identifying what/any alternate evacuation accommodation options may be available for individuals who are considered a COVID-19 risk.
- can other regions/towns in the area be used to move on/accommodate people
- welfare centre staffing levels required to ensure infection control tasks are performed.



- Local Government to consider utilising their existing COVID-19 risk management arrangements until the arrival of Communities staff

## General Infection Control measures

In consideration of the heightened sanitation and hygiene needs of COVID-19, consider the following:

- signage and barriers erected throughout the welfare centre displaying current physical distancing requirements
- signage and posters on appropriate hand washing techniques upon entry and throughout the shelter/centre as well as appropriate techniques for PPE/masks
- a dedicated welfare centre officer responsible of ensuring all recommended infection control measures are in place and maintained
- development of a cleaning schedule posted within the centre
- a contract cleaner arrangement with the owner of the facility – generally the Local Government
- utilise single use disposable items such as bedding, eating/drinking utensils etc where possible
- appropriate waste disposal/laundry processes in place.

## PPE requirements in the Centre

PPE supplies must be available within Welfare Centres including:

- Surgical style masks
- Gloves
- Aprons/gowns
- Face shields/safety glasses

PPE is to be single use, disposable and kept in a secure location. Use will be dependent on risk to the community at the time of the event and in line with health advice.

See [Addendum: Infection Prevention and Control in a Welfare Centre](#) for further information and considerations.

## Welfare Centre Operations

### Arrival at the Centre

The level of screening and requirement to obtain the contact details of people attending an evacuation centre will be dependent on the current [Western Australia COVID-19 restrictions](#) and health advice.

The normal **Register.Find.Reunite** process will be available for all evacuees. This may be compulsory prior to entering a welfare centre if the risk level is such that contact tracing is required. A contact phone number will need to be provided.

Communities may consult with the relevant local health agency to determine what resources are available to assist if health screening needs to occur. If minimal warning is



received prior to the opening of a welfare centre, it is acknowledged that appropriately qualified staff may not be available to support a full health screening process.

### **Screening and Registration considerations as/if required:**

- As a precaution PPE is to be worn by those undertaking registration/screening. Suggested minimum requirements are a mask and safety glasses.
- Encourage self-registration online via the **Register.Find.Reunite** website with evacuees utilising their own electronic devices.
- A separate greeting area to allow those who may be a COVID-19 risk to identify themselves early.
- Single direction of pedestrian flow and queue management should be enforced through signage, floor markings and bollards/ropes.
- Immediate access to hand sanitiser
- Minimise contact with anyone who answers “**yes**” to any of the screening questions.
- Avoiding sharing of writing implements and minimise document handling – utilise hand sanitiser if unavoidable.

The following questions are to be asked as the **minimum screening requirements** before allowing an individual to enter a welfare centre:

- Are you currently under isolation/quarantine direction?
- Have you returned from overseas or interstate (and if so, where?) in the past 14 days?
- Do you have any symptoms of respiratory illness with or without fever; or cold and flu-like symptoms?
- Have you been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in the past 14 days?

If the individual refuses to be screened, that individual should be treated as ill and be placed in an isolated location.

As part of the screening process advise evacuees that if they become symptomatic during their stay, to advise staff immediately. If this occurs, it is suggested welfare centre staff isolate the individual and consult with local health authorities as a matter of priority.

### **Evacuees requiring Isolation**

It is suggested that individuals under isolation/quarantine directions, or who have answered ‘**yes**’ to any of the screening questions, or individuals who have refused to be screened, are to wear a mask at all times and change it as it becomes moist, in line with infection control best practice.

- Individuals under an isolation/quarantine direction should be moved on as soon as practicable to another safe location, including to paid accommodation, where they can maintain their isolation.
- If this is not possible, identify the most suitable strategies to manage the isolation of these individuals within the welfare centre, for example; utilising a separate room or space, barriers, physical distancing etc.



- Where possible, consider specific toilet/ wash facilities for staff/those who have answered “**yes**” to screening questions. If this is not possible, extra cleaning is to occur.

### **General population**

Welfare centres operations are to align with government restrictions, health advice and the level of community COVID-19 risk at the time of an event. The following strategies may be required:

- Families to remain in segregated groups and to not move from sleeping area unless using bathroom facilities.
- Human-social support and entertainment activities to be made available to each segregated group in location
- If family segregation areas are not possible, separate evacuees into larger groups and maintain segregation of groups
- Food should be delivered to areas allocated to each group/family

### **Community meetings**

The HMA may utilise welfare centres for community meetings, in line with the current level of COVID-19 restrictions. Where restrictions prevent utilisation of the welfare centre, alternate arrangements will need to be made.



## Addendum

### Infection Prevention and Control in a Welfare Centre

A dedicated welfare centre officer will have the responsibility of ensuring all recommended infection control measures are in place and maintained. This officer may be a Communities or Local Government staff member.

The following table lists infection control considerations. The level of implementation to be in line with current health advice. Local planning will assist in identifying where responsibility will sit.

Further information is available at:

<https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus>

Practice	Consideration	Responsibility
Hand Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>60-80% alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be available at entry and exit points, high touch areas, toilet areas and eating areas.</li><li>Hand sanitiser should be secured to prevent theft or ingestion</li><li>Hand washing facilities should have running water, soap, paper hand towels and a rubbish bin.</li><li>Consider the stock levels required in relation to the number of evacuees the centre can hold</li><li>Consider signage/pictures throughout the centre to encourage effective hand hygiene</li></ul>	
Physical Distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consider how many evacuees the centre can hold as per the current directions for physical distancing.</li><li>Signage, barriers, notices, pictures, announcements and staff may be required to encourage physical distancing.</li><li>Physical distancing should be considered in all areas of the welfare centre. Use of laundry, entertainment and meal areas may need to be staggered to avoid overcrowding.</li><li>Physical distancing should also be observed for all staff at all times, including break times.</li></ul>	
Food Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Meals may be delivered to individuals or families to reduce the number of people using the meals area.</li><li>The kitchen and meals area should have increased cleaning</li><li>A staggered rostered approach may be considered to ensure these areas do not become overcrowded</li><li>Consider disposable plates and cutlery. If these are not available, washing dishes through the dishwasher is preferred. Otherwise, dishes and cutlery should be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed, dried and stored dry. Consider allocating plates and cutlery to evacuees to reduce sharing of items.</li></ul>	
PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Personal protective equipment may be needed at the welfare centre.</li></ul>	





Practice	Consideration	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider PPE needs for the following situation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff performing health/general screening/registration on arrival to the welfare centre to utilise PPE as per current health advice – suggested minimum requirements are mask and safety glasses.</li> <li>Evacuees that are under isolations orders should wear a surgical mask as much as possible</li> </ul> </li> <li>In the event of community transmission of COVID, all evacuees may be required to wear some sort of mask. Surgical masks are preferred.</li> </ul>	
<b>Cleaning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A cleaning schedule is required with increased frequency of cleaning high touch areas outlined. High touch areas include light fittings, door handles, doors, railings, desks, chairs, tables, benches, bathrooms.</li> <li>A dedicated staff member should be allocated to ensure cleaning is achieved and managed.</li> <li>Cleaning products should have a disinfectant base.</li> <li>As there is the need for increased frequency of cleaning, ensure the cleaning product does not leave a residue that may cause irritations to the evacuees in the centre.</li> <li>Spray products are not recommended as they disturb particles on surfaces, may not give an even coverage of product and may cause lung irritations. If the only products available are spray products, spray into a cloth/paper towel to minimise aerosol distribution of the product and then wipe the area to be cleaned.</li> </ul>	
<b>Waste Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure there are adequate waste disposal bins.</li> <li>Consider hands free bins so there is minimal contact with the bin</li> <li>Anyone handling waste must have access to hand hygiene facilities to perform hand hygiene immediately after handling/removing rubbish. Consider signage near the bins to encourage this.</li> <li>Waste should be emptied regularly. Bags should be tied off completely prior to removal.</li> </ul>	
<b>Managing unwell evacuees/staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider having a plan in place outlining how to manage evacuees or staff who fall ill whilst in a welfare centre. This may include a separate accommodation area, dedicated staff member with clinical experience or further evacuation.</li> </ul>	
<b>Laundry Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If linen/bedding/towels are provided to evacuees, consider how this will be managed. Clean and dirty items should be stored separately. Where will linen bags be kept for the return of dirty linen and who will remove these from the area.</li> <li>If there are laundry facilities at the welfare centre, consider how these will be managed to ensure there is not overcrowding. Staggered rosters for using laundry facilities may be considered. Hand hygiene facilities should be available in the laundry area</li> </ul>	