POLICY 3.18

HEALTH PROTECTION POLICY

Policy statement

Reach has a responsibility and is committed to maintaining a safe work environment for all employees, volunteers and participants in Reach-controlled spaces. Reach aims to take all reasonably practicable steps to manage and control any potential risks to health and wellbeing.

Infectious diseases can have serious health consequences including death, and their enormous impact is felt across the world. Infectious diseases affect the health of individuals directly, and also have an impact on whole societies, economies and political systems. Infectious diseases can spread rapidly and can easily grow out of control and become an epidemic or pandemic.

The purpose of this policy is to assist in identifying and containing potential health risks that may exist for all staff, crew, volunteers, supporters and participants, both within the Reach offices and in other places where Reach activities take place.

This policy outlines the strategies and actions to take to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases or control the transmission of an infectious disease when a confirmed case is identified.

DOCUMENT CONTROL			
Policy Owner:	Office Manager	Next Review Date:	3 years
Approver:	Reach Board	Version No:	A
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Related documentation

3.01 OHS Policy
3.10 OHS Incident Policy
3.09 Working Outdoors Policy
3.08 Risk Assessment Policy
3.15 First Aid Policy
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act) - VIC
Work Health and Safety Act 2011 - NSW
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 – VIC
Public Health Act 2010 and Public Health Amendment (Review) Act 2017 - NSW
WorkSafe Victoria - Preparing for a pandemic: a guide for employers

Definitions

Workplace – Refers to all Reach offices and extends to any external location Reach programs or events are held.

Risk – The possibility of harm to one's physical health or wellbeing (illness or death) when exposed to infectious disease.

Cleaning – A process that removes visible and non-visible contamination such as food waste, dirt, and bacteria from a surface.

Infectious disease – A disease caused by pathogenic microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi that is capable of being transmitted from an infected person or species to another person, through either direct or indirect contact, - for example, by air, water or interpersonal contact. Under Victorian law, a person infected with an infectious disease must be excluded from an education or care service.

Notifiable disease – When certain diseases and illnesses occur, government health authorities must be informed about the occurrence — these are known as 'notifiable' diseases. Being notified about the occurrence of these diseases enables public health authorities to take steps to control the spread of infectious diseases — for example, to avoid an epidemic — and to protect the health of the community. Many, but not all, notifiable diseases are infectious diseases.

Outbreak – A disease outbreak occurs when the World Health Organisation declares there are enough incidences of a disease to be a public health emergency.

Hygiene – The principle of maintaining health and preventing disease especially through cleanliness.

Epidemic – An outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population.

Pandemic – relates to geographic spread and is used to describe a disease that affects a whole country or the entire world.

Operating principles

Responsibilities and duties of employees

All Reach employees and volunteers have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and wellbeing, and to incorporate hygienic practices in the workplace to minimise the risk of spreading illness from infectious disease to others.

Therefore, all staff, crew, volunteers and supporters are expected to assist Reach in achieving and maintaining a healthy and safe working environment. It is therefore expected that all staff, crew, volunteers and supporters will comply with any requirements specified by Reach under this Health Protection Policy.

Responsibilities and duties of Reach

Reach's responsibilities as the employer in relation to infectious diseases are in the areas of:

1. Prevention of infectious disease

2. Recognition of infectious disease risk
3. Management/control of infectious disease

1. Prevention of infectious disease

Reach has a legal and social responsibility to ensure our staff, crew, supporters and volunteers are working in a safe and healthy environment. The following table outlines the strategies and actions Reach implements to prevent the transmission of infectious disease in our offices.

Prevention strategy	Prevention actions
Immunisation	• Recommendation that all employees and volunteers receive a yearly flu vaccination • In some cases, the flu vaccination may be subsidized by Reach • Leading staff act as vaccination advocates
Standard precautions	Standard infection control precautions can minimise the risk of person-to-person transmission. This includes basic hygiene measures that are promoted as "essential to use at all times" by all Reach employees and volunteers, whether they are infected or not. This includes: • Hand hygiene- regular handwashing with soap; recommend use of hand sanitizer regularly and especially after hand contact with others • Respiratory hygiene – cover nose and mouth with elbow when coughing or sneezing, use tissues, and dispose of them appropriately • Minimise touching of eyes, nose and mouth. Reach is responsible for ensuring appropriate hygiene consumables are provided in all Reach offices to support such personal hygiene routines. This includes: • Soap in all toilets • Hand sanitizer in gathering places • Tissues in gathering places • Disinfectant • Rubbish bins in toilets, kitchens and other gathering places • Menstrual waste bins in toilets.
Use of protective equipment	In the event of occupational exposure to bodily fluids (eg. vomit, blood) Reach encourages the use of protective wear such as gloves, eye protection, masks etc.
General office cleanliness	Reach contracts weekly cleaning services to maintain general office building hygiene, including kitchen and bathroom areas. However, Reach believes every individual is responsible for a certain level of upkeep within the Reach spaces to ensure they remain as safe working and professionally-appropriate environments for others. This includes regularly disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces and maintaining cleanliness of personal desk spaces and communal areas such as the kitchen.
Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff are responsible for taking precautions to minimize their risk of illness and infectious disease by wearing protective gear during all potentially harmful or hazardous cleaning duties.

Non-Reach operated spaces

Reach work is conducted at numerous and varying places that are not controlled by Reach, including but not limited to schools, event venues, camp sites and public spaces.

The organisations hosting Reach programs or events have a legal responsibility to provide appropriate protection measures to ensure the health and safety of Reach's representatives and participants. Failure to provide a safe environment may result in Reach taking legal action against them for failure of their duty of care. Reach reserves the right to cancel or withdraw from school workshops, community programs, camps or events in line with government recommendations/guidelines associated with health risk management.

Schools

In line with the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 (VIC) schools have a legal responsibility to help manage infectious diseases in their facilities and are expected to support the prevention and control of disease transmission through:

- meeting legislated requirements for school exclusion, infectious disease notification and immunisation status recording
- supporting the personal hygiene routines of students, for example, providing hand hygiene facilities
- ensuring procedures are in place to safely manage the handling of spills of blood and other body fluids or substances.

Primary schools

As of December 2019 changes to the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations mean failure of a person in charge of a primary school to exclude a child with, or exposed to, a specified infectious disease from a primary school, may result in infringement penalties.

2. Recognition of infectious disease risk

Recognition of infectious disease risk can occur at different levels:

1. Monitoring of expert information sites about infectious diseases
2. Self-detection of infectious disease
3. Observed symptoms of infectious disease in others.

It is important that employees and volunteers report all infectious disease occurrences at Reach, even if they are minor, as this allows Reach to intervene early and take preventative measures in the workplace to reduce the spread.

Monitoring of expert information sites

Monitoring of expert sites and resources is important to stay informed about current health risks.
- Monitor expert advice as outbreaks develop (eg, from the Chief Health Officer, Department of Health and Human Services)
- Review Reach's Health Protection and other related policies, procedures and practices, to ensure they are effective and are being followed
- Issue alerts and precautionary measures / extra care guidance to employees and volunteers
- Follow advice issued by State government and relevant agencies including communicating to employees and vaolunteers about symptoms and precautionary measures
- Consider work locations and travel plans, and decide whether adjustments need to be made to reduce the risks to employees and others

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- Monitor the latest Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) travel advice on the Smartraveller website (link below) for anyone needing to travel overseas for work.

Self-detection of infectious disease

Reach encourages those experiencing any infectious disease symptoms such as fever, flu-like symptoms, vomiting or diarrhea to seek medical attention, and remain at home until symptoms have passed. If they are diagnosed with a notifiable disease there may be a specified exclusion period where they are required to stay away from workplaces and other environments with groups of people (eg, schools, public spaces), to minimise the chance of infecting others. During this period individuals should take personal leave to enable them to rest and recover, as well as to minimise the risk of infecting others.

The health and wellbeing of staff is critical to the functioning of Reach and thus it is desirable to have employees fit and back to work as soon as possible. Therefore proper rest is recommended to allow recovery.

If well enough, an employee may opt to work from home whilst ill, though they should monitor their condition and work only if they believe doing so does not undermine their recovery. Personal leave should be submitted to cover the period of absence, and can be adjusted to account for any time worked while on leave.

Observed symptoms of infectious disease in others

Someone showing signs of communicable disease (fever, flu-like symptoms, vomiting or diarrhea) poses a health hazard to others. Early detection is important to prevent the spread of disease. Therefore, anyone concerned with symptoms presented by another individual in the office is advised to communicate their concern directly to the individual, and offer the following advice:

- encourage them to seek medical attention,
- limit close contact with others
- self-exclude until symptoms have passed or have been cleared by a medical professional.

If advice is not received, please inform the individual's manager and a member of the HR team so that further action can be taken.

Management / control of infectious disease risk

Where a risk to health is identified at the workplace, Reach will, so far as is reasonably practicable, eliminate or minimise the risks. The type of control measure required will depend on the level and severity of risk.

The goal of infectious disease management is to interrupt transmission as quickly as possible and thus prevent further cases. The key responses in attempting to manage/control infectious disease involve:

- Having effective preventative measures in place (per *1. Prevention of infectious disease* above)
- Recognise when a potential or actual outbreak has occurred (per *2. Recognition of infectious disease risk* above)
- Eliminate the source
- Stop further spread
- Prevent recurrence

Eliminate the source - individuals experiencing communicable disease symptoms

Individuals experiencing fever, cold or flu-like symptoms, vomiting or diarrhoea are encouraged to l stay at home until symptoms have passed, limit contact with others and seek medical attention.

Employees should alert their manager if they have been exposed to a person or environment in which an infectious disease has been diagnosed, or at the onset of symptoms.

Reach may ask the employee to seek medical clearance, or work from home during the risk period. If employees are not fit for work due to contracting an infectious disease, they should follow medical advice and remain excluded from the workplace until cleared to return. Alternative working arrangements may be made between employer and employee within reason on a case by case basis.

Eliminate the source – risk or confirmed notifiable infectious disease

If a Reach employee or volunteer is identified as a risk or confirmed with a notifiable infectious disease, Reach reserves the right to exclude that person from the workplace. In this instance, infected individuals are to remain at home or in care for the period of time as specified by the health authority. Infected individuals are to remain excluded from the workplace until all symptoms have passed and they have been cleared by a medical practitioner to return to work. During this period flexible working arrangements may be made within reason, eg working from home.

Stop further spread
An infected individual's working area should be sterilised to prevent transmission to others.

Additional sterilisation activities should be introduced, and employees should increase their own attention to sterilisation (eg, wipe down keyboards and phones, increase frequency of hand sanitiser use).

General hygiene remains the best defence against infection. Reach encourages all unaffected employees and volunteers to regularly wash their hands and cover their nose and mouth if sneezing and coughing.

Travel
Reach employees and volunteers who need to travel for work should review the latest advice regarding infectious diseases, and consider whether there are alternatives to travelling.

If planning overseas travel, individuals must monitor the latest Department of Foreign Affairs Trade (DFAT) travel advice on the Smartraveller website and avoid travel to unsafe environments.

For more information

AUST-WIDE - Public Health Information Hotline - For health emergencies, including natural disasters, communicable disease outbreaks and acts of terrorism. Operates Mon-Fri from 8:30am to 5pm AEST/EADT. In the event on an incident, hours of operation can be extended to 24 hours per day, seven days a week with 24 hours' notice.
         T: 1800 004 599

VIC - Department of Health and Human Services Communicable Disease Prevention and Control
         T: 1300 651 160 (24 hours)
         E: infectious.diseases@dhhs.vic.gov.au

NSW Health – Public Health Units
W: https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Pages/phus.aspx
T: **1300 066 055**

State public health authorities:
- VIC – T: 1300 651 160
- NSW – T: 1300 066 055

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