



COVID-19 BCM BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

PREPARED BY

Strata Community
Association (Qld)



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QLD



COVID-19 BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR BODY CORPORATE MANAGERS

Introduction

SCA (Qld) is the peak body for body corporate and community management in Queensland. Collectively we represent more than 300,000 lot owners and more than 180 professional companies who provide body corporate management services and are suppliers and service providers to the industry. In a state where there is no licensing or regulation requirement, SCA (Qld) provides education, accreditation and advocacy. We lead, support, and represent our members and the greater strata community.

What is SCA (Qld) doing to support the sector?

On 16 March 2020, SCA (Qld) contacted the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management to initiate some guidance on how to manage Committee Meetings and General Meetings in light of the recommended social distancing. Read their guidance on that [here](#).

On 17 March 2020, SCA (Qld) sent an urgent request to the Attorney-General to clarify meeting attendance and voting. Specifically, we asked to resolve the issue that a quorum could be achieved without physically attending, that a meeting is valid without a physical location, and that the body corporate manager should be permitted to receive voting papers. The Attorney-General has responded positively that this request is being considered as a matter of priority.

On 24 March 2020, SCA (Qld) has sent a joint submission to the Attorney-General to clarify that Resident Management Services must be considered essential services due to the critical nature of the job a caretaker does for the community. We outlined that caretakers are front line service providers and that as the COVID-19 crisis evolves, schemes rely on the caretaker to support their running.

On 25 March 2020 SCA (Qld) published a COVID 19 best practice guide as well as a COVID-19 Lot Owner Toolkit. These are free guides, available to the public.

SCA (Qld) will continue to represent the interests of all stakeholders in the sector, with the objective to enable more effective, more timely, and more cost conscious decision making in bodies corporate.

What is this best practice guide about?

SCA (Qld) has been providing critical updates to members since 12 March 2020 when authorities started to get more active in the containment of COVID-19 in Queensland. The updates include information on best practice hygiene, employer information such as pay obligations and remote-working Worksafe requirements; financial support information; government support funding options; technology solutions and a vast amount of resources available to learn more. Contact SCA (Qld) to obtain copies of these critical updates. This best practice guide is a recommendation SCA (Qld) has compiled to assist body corporate managers in their communication and support of committees. This is not an exhaustive guide and we recommend you stay up to date with our information and pop up seminars in the coming weeks.

Disclaimer

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What steps should I take to minimise risk to my staff and clients?

Please encourage all staff to:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water and/or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable hypoallergenic tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing, disposing of tissues immediately after use and either washing your hands or applying hand sanitiser.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a cold or flu-like symptoms; and
- Remain home if feeling unwell.

You should also regularly clean your desk, phone (desk and mobile), tablets and computer keyboards. Furthermore, establishing a designated staff member or utilising a staff roster for regularly cleaning common surfaces including doorknobs, counter tops, bathroom fixtures and reception areas (seating areas and any surfaces such as side tables) at least 2-3 times a day or as directed by the owner or principal.

Should I restrict access to my office?

SCA (Qld) recommends your business adopt precautionary hygiene protocols in and around the office and ask potential visitors who may be feeling unwell to reschedule after 14 days (in accordance with Queensland Health directives). Recommended hygiene protocols include:

- Display appropriate signage at the reception desk with the specific requirements clearly outlined for all prospective visitors to adhere whilst in your office
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser and request all on-site visitors use it upon entering the office
- Request all visitors refrain from touching anything where practical
- Maintain social distancing where practical
- Politely refrain from any physical contact with visitors; and
- Do not permit entry to any visitor who is coughing, sneezing or showing any signs or symptoms of illness.

Shifting to virtual meetings and conference calls are options all staff may also consider in lieu of face-to-face meetings at your office so as to continue conducting business.

You may also consider alternative for providing access to Body Corporate records for search agents.

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Should Meetings be cancelled or postponed?

Recent Government directives and advice has been to cancel or postpone non-essential gatherings, particularly if they will involve large numbers. Technology allows us to continue to hold meetings by embracing technology through telephone and video conferencing. Committee members and lot owners should be discouraged from physically attending meetings and encouraged to instead submit voting papers in advance of any meeting and attend the meeting electronically.

SCA (Qld) encourages all of its members to immediately familiarise themselves with video conferencing technology and provide guides to committee members on how they may be installed and used to keep the industry moving forward (see further on for tech suggestions).

Should I keep a record of visitors to my office?

Yes. It is important to keep a record of any contact your office has had with outside parties in the event of a positive test for COVID-19.

How can I promote personal hygiene to staff and visitors?

Personal hygiene is an important protection against coronavirus and all respiratory illnesses – this includes washing hands regularly. SCA (Qld) members may wish to consider including the promotion of hygiene protocols as part of their standard procedures for meetings and other interactions. It is critical to communicate openly with both clients and customers about the status of your operations, what protective measures you've implemented and how they (as customers) will be protected when interacting with your business.

In addition, you may wish to consider placing posters in your office for your staff as hygiene reminders in the workplace. The Australian Government's Department of Health offers two ready-to-use downloadable posters, which [include](#) one for washing hands ([here](#)) and one for coughing ([here](#)).

What measures should I consider for my office?

The safety and wellbeing of staff is the responsibility of business owners and principals. SCA (Qld), in accordance with Queensland Health, recommends the following measures be taken:

- Keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce the risk of exposure in the workplace
- Make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up-to-date
- Consider extra precautions for staff who might be more vulnerable – for example, those employees aged 60 or over or those who have a pre-existing at risk health condition
- Provide hand-washing facilities and make sure these are kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order

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- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser, disinfectants, disposable hypoallergenic tissues and cleaning supplies
- Promote good hygiene practices such as displaying posters on handwashing and respiratory hygiene
- Keep the workplace clean and hygienic by regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces such as door handles and workstations to prevent contamination
- Visit the [Smartraveller](#) website before arranging business travel to destinations with cases of coronavirus
- Encourage any staff who are sick with respiratory illness to stay home until they've fully recovered
- If considered appropriate after taking medical advice, send home any staff who become ill with respiratory symptoms, advise them to seek medical advice, and call an ambulance if necessary; and
- Discourage any staff member who is suffering from respiratory illness from attending open-homes, inspections, client meetings and other activities that involve human interaction.

Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for advice if a staff member is confirmed to have the coronavirus and inform co-workers about possible exposure, while maintaining confidentiality of any personal information.

More important and specific information on privacy obligations towards staff is accessible [here](#).

What should you do if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

Safe Work Australia has prepared this helpful guidance note accessible [here](#).

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BEST PRACTICE FOR BODIES CORPORATE

Should Body Corporate recreational facilities and other common property areas be closed?

Bodies corporate and their committees should close common property facilities in accordance with Health Directives issued by the Federal and State Government.

At the time of preparing this guide, the Public Health Direction issued by the Queensland Government with effect from 12 midday on Monday, 23 March 2020 (the Non-essential Business Closure direction) relevantly restricts the operation of an undertaking including gyms, fitness centres and indoor sporting centres. The directive includes operating on a private residence, which captures a community titles scheme. An indoor sporting centre includes an indoor pool.

There are other directives and advice issued by government authorities that can apply, such as restricting the use of indoor areas to one person per four square metres. All directives and governmental advice should be monitored daily and followed.

Otherwise, owners and occupiers have the right to use common property subject to the restraint that they do not interfere unreasonably with the use and enjoyment of others lawfully on the common property, or otherwise cause a nuisance. The power to regulate the use of common property and thereby restrict the general right owners and occupiers have is exercised through making a by-law.

SCA (Qld) believes it is best practice for bodies corporate to mitigate the risk of transmission by restricting the use of common facilities that will attract large numbers of people. Strata managers should raise these issues with their committees to seek their direction.

What should you do if a resident in a building you manage tests positive for COVID-19?

You may become aware of a resident being positively tested for COVID-19. If that occurs, and mindful of your privacy obligations (discussed below):

- Understand that the body corporate has no legal obligation to announce any 'confirmed' cases to your community
- Seek direction from the committee on whether they wish to inform other residents and owners, and provide the committee with guidance on their circumstances
- If any information is given to residents and owners, ensure that privacy of the resident concerned is respected. You must not identify the person, their floor level, or disclose any identifiable characteristics.
- Consider informing service providers to the scheme that may be in contact with a confirmed case, so they can wear personal protective equipment.

The *Privacy Act* requires that you (as a strata manager or strata management business) not disclose personal information received unless such disclosure is within the primary purpose of having collected that information. You can disclose personal information that is reasonably necessary in order to prevent or manage COVID-19 in a community titles scheme, or if the person who gave you their personal information consents to it. You should make sure you obtain any such consent in writing, and it should specifically state the personal information they consent to being disclosed.

Strata management employees should review their business' privacy policies before disclosing any personal information.

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Should the Body Corporate place restrictions on lift capacity?

Yes. The use of lifts should be restricted to ensure compliance with the advice being one person per each four-square metres of an enclosed area. The Committee should consider placing hand sanitisers nearby.

What if an owner can't pay their levies or they are severely ill and don't pay on time? Is it business as usual?

The body corporate has the power to amend levies at a general meeting. Bodies corporate may wish to consider reducing levies in the interim at a general meeting or alternatively the committee has the power to apply discounts, waive penalties and recovery costs in exceptional circumstances. The committee must act reasonably. The Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management do not have a compliance role and would only make an order if someone were to dispute the body corporate's decision. The adjudicator would have to decide if there was a detriment to someone before ruling a decision invalid.

And remember...

We ❤️ strata and we especially care about each and every one of our more than 1000 members. Feel free to reach out to SCA (Qld) for assistance throughout this crisis and more information.

Admin.qld@strata.community

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