

## Updated 6 August 2020 – COVID-19 FAQs

### COVID FAQ DISCLAIMER

This FAQ has been developed by Volunteering Victoria using the latest advice from the Victorian Government, specifically the Department of Health and Human services. Should you require further information about Stage 4 restrictions and how they impact your volunteer involvement please contact us on [info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au) and we will seek advice for you.

These guidelines were developed based on restrictions announced over the period 2 – 6 August 2020. Please be aware some of the advice may change as restrictions are changed in metro Melbourne and the rest of Victoria.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
<i>Can community services continue to operate under stage 4 restrictions?</i>	Community services which are required to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people should continue to be provided.
<i>Does the curfew in metropolitan Melbourne apply to work/volunteering?</i>	Yes for the general community but not if you provide community services which are required to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people, e.g. family violence support, child protection, AOD services, disability support services, family services, sexual assault services.  Essential volunteers will be required to have a permit specifying their shift time and endorsed by your organisation.
<i>Can I travel beyond the 5km metropolitan Melbourne limit for work/volunteering?</i>	Yes, you may travel outside the 5km radius for work/volunteering, including to visit or support clients.

## Stage 4 – Metropolitan Melbourne

### Essential Services

The health and the safety of you and your volunteers and the community is the highest priority. It is important at all times to follow the **directions of the Department of Health and Human Services**.

### **Is my organisation still allowed to engage volunteers?**

- Yes. Volunteering is essential and an important part of our community response. If you have virtual volunteers that you are supporting they are absolutely still allowed to and encouraged to continue to volunteer from home.
- **DHHS outlines which industries are closed, open (with a COVID safe plan), and restricted and specifies that this applies to essential paid or unpaid work.**



- Essential services volunteers are still permitted but it is important for you to consider whether any further modifications can be made to your services or model to ensure that as few people are out and about as possible.
- Volunteers are under no obligation to continue to volunteer if they are concerned or do not feel comfortable or safe doing so. Your organisation has an obligation under Work Health and Safety legislation to provide adequate health and safety protection.

#### **What sectors are still allowed to support volunteering on site during the current stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne?**

- Many services have been scaled back or modified further to assist with Stage 4 restrictions, but community services which are required to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people should continue to be provided (e.g. food relief, aged care and disability care). Organisations may be operating under new models (such as click and collect) for food relief to reduce travel or numbers of the workforce required on site.
- Some sectors (aged care) may be operating with specific restrictions which will impact the involvement of volunteers. Information on specific sectors from DHHS can be found [here](#).
- All sectors must abide by [hygiene and distancing advice](#) and [mask wearing directives](#). Information for these can be found here on the DHHS website.

#### **Can my service operate outside of the curfew hours?**

- If your service provides community services which are required to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people it may be permitted to operate outside of curfew hours.
- Organisations are encouraged to consider the curfew hours and whether services can be adapted.
- Regardless of when your service operates, any essential volunteers will be required to have a permit specifying their shift time and endorsed by your organisation.

#### **Am I still required to support volunteers who are worried about meeting their mutual obligation requirements?**

- No, all mutual obligations have been suspended in Victoria for the time being.

#### **Volunteer recruitment:**

##### **Can our organisation recruit new volunteers during Stage 4?**

- Your organisation can still recruit new volunteers for essential services during Stage 4 however roles will have to be performed virtually (online advertisements, and interviews and screening). If it's a non-essential service, consider until after Stage 4 restrictions have been lifted.

#### **What responsibilities do we have to notify work safe should one of our volunteers get COVID19?**

As an organisation you should notify work safe immediately if one of your volunteers gets COVID-19. The policy and procedure should be the same for if an employee gets COVID-19.



**We are an essential service and many of our volunteers have indicated that they no longer want to volunteer. Where can I find additional resources to help deliver our programs?**

- Volunteering Victoria has an active register of interested volunteers during this pandemic through the emergency volunteering portal. <https://emergency.volunteer.org.au/> Contact Volunteering Victoria to see whether there are volunteers available in your community.
- Sign up to [SEEK Volunteer/GoVolunteer](#) to advertise for volunteers. You can specify categories such as commitment and area of interest and also provide information on the steps your organisation has taken/is taking for volunteering to continue during Stage 4. Also have a look at this page for other options: <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/managing-volunteers/searching-for-volunteers/>.

**COVID safe plan:**

**What is a COVID safe plan?**

- Your COVID Safe Plan helps protect your workers, customers and visitors and to prepare for a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace. This is a DHHS requirement for operating when your organisation has more than five people on site. More information can be found at [Business Victoria](#).
- Your COVID Safe Plan must set out:
  - Your actions to help prevent the introduction of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace.
  - The level of face-covering or personal protective equipment (PPE) required for your workforce.
  - How you will prepare for, and respond to, a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace.
  - This plan must demonstrate how you will meet all of the requirements set out by the Victorian Government. Some higher-risk industries or workplaces have additional requirements for employers and employees.

**Where can I find a relevant industry template for a COVID safe plan?**

- COVID safe templates are available from Business Victoria [here](#).

We are entirely volunteer run. Business Victoria states that COVID safe plans apply to businesses with over 5 employees. Given we don't have any employees do we still need to create a plan?

- Yes if you will have more than 5 people onsite at one time. This includes employees and volunteers.



**I am a sole operator and volunteer my own time to distribute emergency food services in in the area, do I need a COVID safe plan?**

- While it is not mandatory for you to have a COVID safe workplan if you have less than 5 people in your workforce, it is strongly advised that you consider how you can ensure that you and anybody you work with is COVID safe.
- [Business Victoria](#) has a number of resources that can assist both large and small organisations to operate in a COVID safe way.

**PPE:**

**What sort of PPE is required for our volunteer program?**

- This will vary according to the nature of the volunteer role and environment you are operating in, and the different sector you may be in. According to Stage 4 restrictions specific advice has been provided for Aged Care and Disability Care sectors. Other sectors may seek advice from Business Victoria.
- At a minimum as per the mask wearing directive, masks are required to be worn by all Victorians when outside of the home.

**What sort of PPE do we need to provide for our volunteers?**

- You need to provide as much PPE as is required by DHHS guidelines. That will vary depending on the sector that you are in. Some sectors such as Aged Care have specific requirements which are available [here](#).
- For others mandated PPE may be as simple as mandated masks across Victoria.
- DHHS is working to get facemasks out to vulnerable Victorians. More information is available [here](#).

**Is it reasonable for us to ask our volunteers to provide their own facemasks?**

- All Victorians need to have their own facemasks when in the public, so it is reasonable to expect them to have their own already. If your industry is subject to specific standards around the quality of facemasks it is best to supply them for volunteers. DHHS is currently trying to make sure facemasks get to the most vulnerable Victorians who may need them. More information is available [here](#).

**I'm unsure how risky our volunteer model is, how do we assess our transmission risk?**

- Use the [transmission risk assessment guide](#) developed by DHHS and Neighbourhood Houses. It is found on page 7.

**Movement/permits:**

Our organisation requires volunteers to volunteer onsite – how can I ensure my volunteers are not fined when coming to and from their house to volunteer?



- Volunteers will be able to come and go provided that they have a permit and have been endorsed by your organisation as playing a vital role in the delivery of essential services.

**Our organisation is outside our volunteers 5km radius, can they still travel to attend their volunteer shift?**

- Volunteers will be able to come and go provided that they have a permit and have been endorsed by your organisation as playing a vital role in the delivery of essential services.

**How can I issue a permit for my volunteers so it is official?**

- Essential workers and volunteers will be required to carry a permit issued by the Department of Justice and Community Safety. This permit will be signed and endorsed by the Organisation (employer) and the volunteer (employee). It will specify Employer details, employee details, a signed declaration, and hours of work.
- The permit asks about the nature of the permitted on-site role. If the role is delivery in nature (i.e. community transport driver) specifying this should assist with covering the volunteer while they are traveling as part of their volunteer duties.

**Where can I apply for a permit for my volunteers?**

- You can download a permit for work from the [Department of Justice and Community Safety Website](#). This needs to be signed by the organisation (employer) and the volunteer (employee).

**Can my volunteers travel outside of a 5km radius as part of their volunteer shift (i.e. delivering meals or community transport?)**

- Volunteers will be able to travel as part of their volunteer duties provided they are always carrying their permit with them.
- Volunteers can carry an electronic or a paper copy of their permit providing it has been signed by the organisation (employer) and the volunteer (employee)
- Serious fines exist for organisations and individuals who are found not to be carrying a permit.

**My organisation doesn't fit the template provided by the Victorian government. Our work doesn't have shifts (i.e. responding to calls about animal welfare). How can I ensure my volunteers have permission to go?**

- Volunteering is not always undertaken in predictable shifts when it comes to responding to emergencies. Where volunteer shifts are unpredictable but essential services are permitted under the stay at home directives it is encouraged that organisations fill in the information related to the shift time when they are called out as part of emergency assistance.
- Serious fines exist for volunteers and organisations who do not have permits, or are found to be issuing permits where volunteers are not performing essential services under the stay at home directives.



**I run volunteer food relief operations myself. How can I get someone to endorse the permits?**

- Where volunteers are sole operators and provide essential services (such as food relief) they are absolutely still allowed to operate.
- Individuals in these circumstances are encouraged to fill out both the organisation (employer) and the volunteer (employee) section of the permit to have on hand to explain to any enforcement officers if necessary.
- Collecting emergency food assistance or delivering emergency food assistance is permitted outside of the 5km radius.

**We have volunteers from regional Victoria who volunteer onsite in Melbourne. Are they still permitted to volunteer on-site?**

- The Premier has advised that movement is to be limited as much as possible between Melbourne and regional Victoria.
- While volunteering is still permitted it is preferable for organisations to make alternative arrangements or pause volunteer involvement at this time if it doesn't impact the ability to provide services to vulnerable Victorians in industries that are still permitted to operate.

**We are based in regional Victoria but we have volunteers from metro Melbourne who volunteer on-site. Are they allowed to leave Melbourne to attend their volunteering shift?**

- The Premier has advised that movement is to be limited as much as possible between Melbourne and regional Victoria.
- While volunteering is still permitted it is preferable for organisations to make alternative arrangements or pause volunteer involvement at this time if it does not impact the ability to provide services to vulnerable Victorians in industries that are still permitted to operate.
- It is preferable that you seek volunteers from the local area in regional Victoria to assist with essential volunteer services at this time.

**We are only allowed to provide online services under Stage 3. Does that mean that all other volunteers that do not live onsite like gardeners, cleaners etc must stay at home?**

- Yes. Regular gardening services fall outside of the requirements of community services providing essential services for vulnerable Victorians. Emergency circumstances such as removal of a dangerous branch or tree may be considered where it is essential. Cleaning services may continue to ensure that the space is meeting DHHS hygiene and safety requirements if the space has individuals on-site.

**Are volunteers from outside allowed to come in and operate the online equipment?**

- Only if your service is a Community services which is required to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people (eg online lifeline counselling activities that cannot be done from home).

[volunteeringvictoria.org.au](https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au)

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- For other activities such as Adult Education activities which are not an essential service it is not permitted for volunteers to travel to site to operate the online environment.
- If your organisation is struggling to access resources to operate from individuals' homes, consider applying for a Let's Stay Connected Grant. <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/lets-stay-connected-fund>

#### **Does our organisation need to be incorporated to qualify for a permit?**

- In order to qualify for a permit your organisation needs to be providing essential services but does not need to be incorporated. The Victorian government understands that some food relief organisations may not be incorporated and still seeking to operate.

For those organisations its advised your volunteers carry proof of your activities and organisation (like a website, or a newspaper article) and fill out as many fields of the permit as possible. In the ABN field simple put n/a – unincorporated organisation

#### **Other questions:**

##### **Where can I go to for more support?**

The Business Victoria coronavirus hotline (13 22 15) and DHHS hotline (1800 675 398) remain the key channels for Victorian businesses and the community at this time.

The [Business Victoria website](#) has also been updated with information on creating a COVID Safe workplace – what employers need to know, including employer obligations information, fact sheets and more.

Please have patience as these organisations are inundated with queries.

### **Stage 3 – Rest of Victoria**

#### **Essential services**

##### **Can my organisation still engage volunteers?**

Yes – Work paid or unpaid (volunteer) is one of the four reasons that individuals can leave home for. Where possible you should be seeking to convert your volunteer opportunities to virtual (online) opportunities that can be completed from home.

