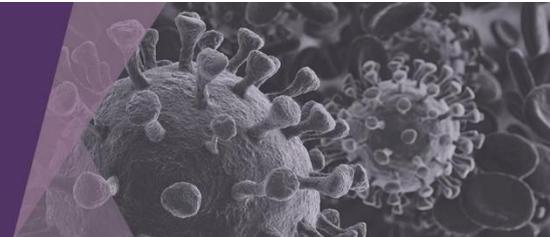


## Coronavirus (COVID-19)



### Case study: COVID-19 positive case of Bundaberg seasonal worker (June 2020)

On Friday 5 June 2020, a 24-year-old man tested positive for COVID-19. The man arrived in Bundaberg from Melbourne, and started working as a seasonal worker on a Queensland farm. He completed one shift before his diagnosis.

The worker submitted the correct documentation prior to arriving in Queensland and was allowed into the state under the exemptions for essential workers.

While Queensland Health investigated the incident and ensured the safety of staff and the community, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and industry collaborated on a plan to support local agribusinesses meet their COVID-19 requirements.

#### Implementation of a health management plan (HMP)

An [HMP](#) (also known as a Workplace health management plan) was a requirement for businesses that employed seasonal workers to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in Queensland.

The Bundaberg farm was well prepared and had developed and implemented an HMP for their accommodation facilities, transport, on-farm packing, harvesting and farm management activities.

The farm worked alongside Queensland Health separating teams of workers and installing clear reporting and testing systems on-farm to minimise transfer risks within their workplace. They also had clear procedures on the use of personal protective equipment, hand washing, social distancing and cleaning.

After the worker tested positive, workers were tested at pop-up testing facilities on-farm in Bundaberg and at the local hospital. High-risk workers and the patient were placed into self-isolation or into enforced quarantine for 14 days.

The farm's HMP included record-keeping that enabled Queensland Health to quickly conduct tracing and containment activities based on where the worker may have made contact since arrival.

All areas of the farm where the worker had visited, including the accommodation site, were thoroughly cleaned. The produce packed prior to shut down was assessed by Queensland Health to ensure food safety was maintained. The Chief Health Officer advised the produce was not at any risk.

Food safety checks were undertaken to ensure the business could return to full production safely. The business was allowed to return to normal operations quickly as they had their HMP systems in place prior to the positive case occurring.

#### Government and industry collaboration

After the incident, DAF moved to ensure agribusinesses were meeting their COVID-19 requirements, via their HMP.

DAF continued to meet with Queensland Health, the Bundaberg District Disaster Management Group, Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Growcom, Queensland Strawberries, Berries Australia and farm management to share intelligence and provide consistent communication.

Not all agribusinesses in the Bundaberg region who employ seasonal workers had implemented an HMP. Without a clear plan, many workplaces and the wider community were at increased risk in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

Through a coordinated and targeted communication strategy, DAF and industry groups actively targeted agribusinesses in Bundaberg to ensure that they were aware of their obligations under the Seasonal Worker direction. Direct communication was undertaken with agribusiness through targeted SMS, emails, and phone calls from DAF's agricultural coordination officers and industry representatives. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of HMPs registered with Queensland Health (a requirement at the time).

Bundaberg agribusinesses played a vital role throughout this incident, reducing the risk of spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and ensuring supply chains remained open.

Discussions with agribusinesses also raised the issue of the language being used to avoid miscommunication or misinformation. For many seasonal workers, English was not their first language, so they did not fully understand the terms such as hotspot, or what was required by self-isolation. The workers had the impression that once they had filed the correct paperwork they could work on arrival into Queensland.

DAF initiated multi-lingual and translation services to ensure seasonal workers were able to access documentation, processes and information in their own languages.

## How other agribusinesses can learn from the Bundaberg case

Fortunately, the agribusiness at the centre of the COVID-19 incident had a robust HMP in place for their seasonal workers at the farm, in their accommodation and for their transport business.

As a result, the COVID-19 response was rapid and quickly contained the transmission. There was minimal disruption to the agribusiness and operations quickly returned to normal.

There is no evidence to suggest that food—like fresh produce—is a source of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. It is also unlikely that a person will contract COVID-19 from food or packaging.

## Current requirements

All businesses must have a COVID safe management plan (or work health and safety plan) in place. This covers your obligations under work health and safety laws to keep your customers and staff safe.

Follow advice from [Workplace Health and Safety Queensland](#) when developing your plan. You should also consider [Queensland Health directions](#) and consult with your staff.

The requirement to have an HMP in place has changed under the [Seasonal Workers International Quarantine Plans and Checklist Direction](#).

Businesses that employ seasonal workers must now use the [COVID safe checklist: Seasonal Worker Business](#) and:

- collect contact information using the [Check In Qld app](#)
- comply with public health controls such as cleaning and hygiene measures

- comply with the occupant density in indoor spaces where practicable—no more than 1 person per 2 square metres.
- have in place a work health and safety (WHS) risk management framework that outlines how COVID-19 will be managed

A seasonal worker is someone who travels to or within Queensland for work as it becomes available, requiring them to relocate and stay in temporary accommodation. It includes contractors, staff who move between locations, non-permanent residents, temporary visa holders and backpackers.

A specific HMP is now not required, though existing HMPs can be used to fulfil the requirement for management of COVID-19 through the WHS risk management framework.

The terms 'COVID safe plan' and 'Health management plan' are often used interchangeably and can be part of your overall WHS plan, but they must detail how COVID-19 will be effectively managed to protect your staff, customers and visitors in your workplace.

It no longer needs to be submitted to the Chief Health Officer for approval, but should be made available when requested.

For more information call DAF on 13 25 23 or email [info@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@daf.qld.gov.au).

Case study updated 15 November 2021