

Resources Sector National COVID-19 Response Protocols

Supporting guide for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, including remote communities

Version 1.4

Draft update as at 13 April 2021

Introduction

Australia's minerals industry is committed to genuine dialogue, respect and support for the aspirations of First Nations landholders and communities. This includes the responsibility to support community-led responses which keep people safe and support local resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 developed a comprehensive national plan to support public health actions and responses relating to Indigenous people, populations and communities. The advisory group reports to the [Chief Medical Officer](#) and informs the Communicable Diseases Network Australia and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

The plan reinforces the importance of locally-led, comprehensive and culturally safe arrangements. It also identifies specific considerations in a COVID-19 context, including highly mobile populations, higher visitor flow (including due to FIFO and DIDO), existing higher chronic disease burden and social, health and economic inequalities.

Starting in March 2020, the MCA – in consultation with the national Aboriginal health sector and state chambers – developed various resources to assist companies to minimise transmission risks while maintaining essential services and safe operations. A resources list is on Page 2.

Resources Sector National COVID-19 Response Protocols

Reinforcing and operating concurrently with public health advice, the [Resources Sector National COVID-19 Response Protocols](#) include commitments to protect and support the minerals workforce, suppliers and local communities, including remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Companies must help keep communities safe at the same time as providing essential support.

Ongoing consultation underpins protocol implementation.

Guidance purpose

This guidance aims to assist implementation of protocols relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, particularly remote communities. It aims to inform rather than prescribe a company's response. Companies should also refer to other published standards and guidance regarding engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The document will be updated as the pandemic changes, in line with advice from governments, communities, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 and other stakeholders.

Structure

This guidance is structured as follows: the relevant protocol is defined followed by a range of supporting actions (**Practice**) that may assist to implement protocol.

This guide was updated in April 2021 to reflect the commencement of the Australian vaccination rollout, the National Resources Sector Position Statement on COVID-19 Vaccinations and lessons learned from 2020.

This follows updates on 9 July 2020 to reflect the lifting of specific public health travel restrictions in some remote areas and 17 April 2020 to reference the [practical guide](#) to support Resources Sector National COVID-19 Response Protocols implementation.

Industry resources

The MCA, together with state chambers and in consultation with Indigenous organisations, has developed resources to help companies at the corporate and site level. All resources are available at <https://minerals.org.au/communities>.

National Resources Sector Position Statement on COVID-19 Vaccinations	The position statement affirms industry's support for the Australian vaccination rollout strategy, how it will assist implementation and key issues for consideration.
Minerals industry remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community health response framework	Provides suggestions to support health responses across the COVID-19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations Management Plan's four pandemic phases.
Minerals industry remote Indigenous community response flowchart	Provides a step-by-step guide as to how industry can align with the four phases identified in the COVID-19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations Management Plan. Tailored for site emergency response plans.
COVIDSafe: Minerals industry remote communities transition engagement framework	Supports companies to prepare for easing of public health measures enacted to keep remote communities safe. Highlights five key considerations relating to health and hygiene protocols and local health systems, vulnerable workers, shared medium-term engagement arrangements, internal business planning and local pandemic response planning.
Community Engagement Checklist	Assists broader community engagement. May be useful in informing planning at a regional level.
Summer Planning Checklist	Assists mine sites and companies to plan for increased travel, staff leave and other considerations arising during the summer months.

Public health resources

The Australian Government Department of Health website includes advice, resources and guidance relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including remote communities.

More: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and remote communities | Australian Government Department of Health](#)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19	Provides information about this specialist advisory group co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Department of Health.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations Management Plan	The comprehensive plan developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 to support a First Nations-led, culturally-safe, locally centred and effective health response.
List of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health organisations	An Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet resource to help find a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisation.
CDNA National Guidance for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for COVID-19	The guidance provides recommendations for communities to protect themselves against COVID-19.
Communications materials	Assists broader community engagement. May be useful in informing planning at a regional level.
COVID-19 vaccination communications materials	Various resources to support community engagement and health promotion regarding COVID-19 vaccination.

Protocol

Cease non-essential face-to-face activities with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote communities while maintaining strong engagement, including support for community-led health planning and local economic activity.

Note: In some areas, face-to-face engagement activities have recommenced in accordance with public health measures, where safe to do so and with strict health and hygiene measures in place.

Practice

- Continuously monitor and comply with public health advice regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, including remote communities:
 - Be prepared to cease non-essential face-to-face engagement quickly if public health advice and local preferences change.
- Defer or find alternate ways of undertaking non-essential face-to-face activities, noting the nature of essential and non-essential activities will shift over time:
 - For example, additional water monitoring activities may be essential during the wet season as part of environmental management plans and operating conditions.
- Use technology such as video conferencing, email, radio, telephone, webinars, social media and other channels as appropriate to support ongoing engagement.
- Continue to deliver shared commitments and support in accordance with partnership arrangements and agreements:
 - Where delivery of a commitment is not practical, alternate arrangements should be made or activities deferred by mutual agreement.
 - Any changes in arrangements should be communicated in a timely, transparent and appropriate manner.

Queensland case study: Keeping the conversation going in Cape York

Glencore took the decision to suspend project team travel to Aurukun prior to official travel restrictions to Cape York being imposed in March 2020.

While travel was suspended, the Glencore team made information videos for display in the community and on a dedicated Facebook page. The videos gave updates on Glencore's bauxite project and summarised feedback and input from Traditional Owners during consultation.

Glencore and the Traditional Owner Working Group continued discussion by video conference using tablets. Glencore team members living in the community facilitated the meetings.

When regional travel restrictions lifted, Weipa-based Glencore team members joined the local community at the 2020 Aurukun Community Day.

As travel restrictions have lifted, the Glencore team have been able to visit the Aurukun community under conditions. All personnel must undergo a health assessment and comply with health, travel and other requirements detailed in the local community response plan. Physical distancing and other hygiene measures must be observed at all times in the community.

Protocol

Take special care in areas where a workforce is resident near Indigenous communities, including restricting workforce access to certain areas where appropriate. Arrangements are being developed in consultation with governments and remote Indigenous communities.

Practice

- Monitor and respect public health measures, including travel restrictions
- Engage local disaster management committees and local health systems to confirm local health protection, promotion and management measures, including agreed arrangements to limit transmission risks. This should include evacuation arrangements in cases where they are identified
- Communicate measures and restrictions in timely, relevant and appropriate ways.

Protocol

Continuously communicate health, hygiene and other arrangements to key stakeholders using appropriate channels to prevent community transmission, support local responses and maintain socio-economic resilience.

Practice

- Identify and engage with relevant stakeholders, especially local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, councils, community health services, schools and business chambers:
 - The Community Engagement Checklist provides a starting list.
- Obtain input and feedback to understand local priorities and concerns, health and community plans and preferred engagement methods to inform the mine site/company stakeholder engagement plan and COVID-19 management plan:
- Use or tailor existing or establish appropriate channels to communicate accurate, timely and relevant information about a mine site/company's pandemic response:
 - Information should be provided in an appropriate manner including in plain English and in language. Seeking regular feedback from stakeholders about the type and form of information provided is important.
- Engage and/or participate in local disaster management committees and health systems to support local health measures, promotion and management measures:
 - This can include contributing to arrangements to limit transmission risks and evacuation plans and recognising that these arrangements may change over time.
- Ensure stakeholders can easily contact the mine site/company with concerns, questions and to seek support. Feedback mechanisms should be tested, reviewed and improved regularly.
- Continuously seek to improve communication and engagement based on lessons, stakeholder feedback and industry collaboration.

Case study: Staying engaged to progress shared priorities

Newmont works closely with the Central Land Council (CLC) and remote Warlpiri communities near its Tanami gold operations in the Northern Territory. From a Newmont perspective, collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic has minimised transmission risk, extended local assistance and enabled action towards long-term community and mine priorities.

Newmont's actions included:

- Engaging regularly with CLC on site health measures, operational activities, manage land access permitting, implement the Tanami Desert Ten Year Plan priorities and make arrangements for local Aboriginal workers
- Maintaining emerging support for locals travelling along the Tanami Highway under strict protocols
- Using video conferencing so strategic commitments including the Tanami Desert Ten Year Plan Steering Committee and support for the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust and the Granites Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation meetings can continue
- Maintaining open communication with remote communities such as Yuendumu and Lajamanu through CLC, local Warlpiri radio, key community and organisational contacts.

Newmont engaged all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees early to advise of COVID-19 risks and screen for remote community interaction risks. Newmont then organised for employees at higher risk of illness and/or living with remote communities to transition to paid special leave.

Newmont also sustained support for Yapa Creek, an entry-level employment programme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, by scheduling off-site training and work in communities.

Protocol

Continue essential services provision including health services, electricity and emergency response capability. Strict hygiene protocols are in place for employees undertaking essential services in communities. This includes:

- Training of all staff on hygiene and health protocols for engaging with all visitors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote communities
- Use of personnel protective equipment and other measures.

Health education to ensure that employees who are unwell do not attend work.

Practice

- Train and monitor all workers, suppliers and contractors in protocols and other health and hygiene measures, noting the need for clear policies and procedures
- Develop new processes to eliminate or minimise person-to-person contact when delivering essential services, including through physical distancing and use of digital technologies such as video conferencing. Processes should be developed in consultation with Traditional Owner organisations, local Indigenous health organisations and other groups
- Support partner suppliers and contractors to train their own staff in hygiene protocols and other health and hygiene measures, including assisting them to develop appropriate procedures and processes.

Queensland case study: Using social media to stay connected

Short videos featuring Rio Tinto Weipa Operations' General Manager and other updates via social media have helped keep communities informed about the mine's health measures and community support.

Types of information covered in the updates include how Rio Tinto has sought to address community concerns or advice and engagement with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. Videos have also explained how Rio Tinto is working with Local Disaster Management Groups from across the Cape to support the COVID-19 response.

Rio Tinto also mobilised significant local support. This included working with the Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council in support of a generator and cold room for essential food suppliers and donating hand sanitiser made by the Rio Tinto lab to local health organisations in Weipa, Napranum and Mapoon.

Protocol

Support local Indigenous health services providers and governments to undertake awareness activities and implement health, hygiene and preparedness activities:

- Provide support for development and delivery of culturally-appropriate health promotion activities
- Act on opportunities to support preparedness, including providing logistical and transportation assistance and specialist advice where practical.

Local community relations personnel should lead essential engagement with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Practice

- Engage with local health departments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations, emergency services and other groups to support and understand local pandemic response plans, including evacuation arrangements for suspected or diagnosed cases
- Engage local health services providers to provide technical assistance and identify and support provision of health equipment and supplies where practical:
 - This includes actions in support of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.
- Share and promote culturally-appropriate and tailored health information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, families and communities:
 - Engage with local Indigenous health providers and other organisations to access appropriate materials.
- Provide support, including in-kind and financial assistance, to enable First Nations organisations to develop, promote and share health advisory information in language, via Indigenous media and in person where practical.

Protocol

Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including Traditional Owners, moving between remote communities.

- Progressing arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees returning from sites to remote communities
- This may include arrangements for residents to be tested for COVID-19 as a precautionary measure and providing health, hygiene and other essentials as appropriate
- Working with governments, Indigenous organisations, supplier partners and other organisations to meet local social needs arising from increased populations in remote Indigenous communities.

Practice

- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to return to their community, noting public health advice, individual and community aspirations and local arrangements if possible
- Implement COVID-19 testing regimes during work periods and prior to returning to communities as a precautionary measure.
- Continue to provide in-kind and financial support where possible to meet increased infrastructure needs, including for housing, coldrooms and refrigeration, food and essential goods.

Western Australian case study: Supporting COVID-19 measures at a major community festival

The Martu people are the Traditional Owners of the lands on which Newcrest's Telfer mine operates. For decades, Telfer has worked to maintain a positive relationship and support the aspirations and priorities of the Martu community.

Newcrest is pleased to support the Ngurra Kujungka Sports Council, a Martu-led program to support health and wellbeing through sport in Western Desert communities. With the full support of Newcrest, the council was incorporated to take on community ownership and management of the Western Sports Program Newcrest developed and operated with the Martu people for 13 years.

In 2020, the Ngurra Kujungka Sports Council undertook extensive preparations so the Martu Youth Festival could take place safely. This included operating in accordance with the local community COVID-19 health management plan. Newcrest provided a financial contribution as well as point-of-care testing equipment, hand sanitisers for the festival and physical distancing reminder signs.