

Pol_327	Epidemic/Pandemic Policy
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From time to time, infectious diseases develop into epidemics or pandemics, and create increased risks for the community. These occasions require specific policies targeted at the particular disease in question and general efforts at preparedness.

Life Choice wishes as far as possible to protect its participants, its staff, its volunteers, and the general public from infection or contagion by epidemics and/or pandemics.

Life Choice will facilitate, through its policies and procedures, strategies designed to reduce risks to its participants, its staff, its volunteers, and the general public, consistent with occupational/work health and safety obligations.

Life Choice will comply with all directions from authorised public health officers and recognised medical authorities in relation to the epidemic or pandemic.

This policy falls within the field of operation of Life Choice's overall Risk Management Processes and is thus under the general supervision of the organisation's Quality & Risk Committee.

Record of policy development

Version	Date approved	Date for review
2021/1	December 2021	December 2023

Responsibilities and delegations

This policy applies to	All Life Choice staff
Policy approval	Quality & Risk Committee

Policy context – this policy relates to:

Standards	<i>Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019).</i> <i>National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards (2nd edition)</i> NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators NDIS Legislation Amendment (quality Indicators) Guidelines 2021
Legislation	Work Health and Safety Act 2011 Workers in a healthcare setting (COVID-19 Vaccination Requirements) Direction 10 November 2021
References	Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare Queensland Health. Infection Prevention (Updated April 2016). Department of Health Queensland.

	https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelinesprocedures/diseases-infection/infection-prevention NDIS Code of Conduct
Organisation policies	Infection Prevention and Control policy Risk Management Policy and Procedure Work Health Safety Environmental Policy and Procedure Code of Conduct Vaccination policy
Forms, record keeping, other documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Check Register • Job descriptions • New Employee Details • Participant Intake Form • Privacy and Confidentiality Agreement • Safe Environment Checklist • Staff Orientation Checklist • Staff Training Plan • Training needs analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the strategies and actions that Life Choice intends to take to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases that are epidemics or pandemics and control the transmission of infectious diseases when a case/s is identified.

This policy applies to employees, contractors, consultants, and volunteers at Life Choice, including all personnel affiliated with third parties.

This policy & procedure is not intended to override any industrial instrument, contract, award or legislation, including:

- Biosecurity Act 2015 (Commonwealth)
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth)
- Fair Work Regulations 2009 (Commonwealth)

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, infectious diseases mean diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi; the diseases can be spread, directly or indirectly, from one person to another. This policy is focused on infectious diseases that are declared to be an epidemic or pandemic.

For the purpose of this policy, employees, contractors, consultants and volunteers will be referred to as 'staff' or 'staff members'.

Policy

Life Choice will as far as possible plan for and make advance preparations for the possibility that its operations will be affected by an epidemic or pandemic. In the event of an epidemic or pandemic, Life Choice will, as far as possible:

- Assist its participants, staff and others, as relevant, to minimise their exposure to the illness concerned.
- Encourage and assist those who have reason to believe that they are at risk of contracting the epidemic or pandemic to obtain a diagnosis and to seek treatment, where appropriate.
- Support employees, volunteers, contractors and participants to take reasonable precautions to prevent infection or contagion.
- Provide personal protective equipment to employees, volunteers, contractors and participants, where appropriate.
- Require employees, volunteers, contractors and participants to take reasonable precautions to prevent infection or contagion.
- Maintain its services and operations throughout the period of concern.

In the event of an infectious disease being declared an epidemic or pandemic, Life Choice requires people covered by this policy to:

- take all precautions required by the appropriate authorities.
- take any additional precautions mandated by the board after considering appropriate medical advice.

In carrying out the procedures listed below, Life Choice will be guided by the information and directions provided by local health authorities and the World Health Organisation, and its occupational health and safety obligations.

Leave and Flexibility

Life Choice recognises that employees may request or require paid and unpaid leave when they are unwell, at risk of or vulnerable to infection, and at risk of infecting others. Life Choice recognises that volunteers may request or require an absence when they are unwell, at risk of or vulnerable to infection, and at risk of infecting others.

Workers may make use of leave consistent with Life Choice's leave policy, relevant industrial instruments, and the National Employment Standards, including access to unpaid leave.

Life Choice may, at its discretion, direct those affected or reasonably at risk of being affected by the pandemic or epidemic, to remain away from the workplace or work remotely.

Above and beyond provisions

Life Choice may subsidise any reasonable medical expenses incurred by any employees directed by Life Choice to obtain medical clearance for the infectious disease before returning to work.

Life Choice may, at its discretion offer any employee who is diagnosed with the infectious disease in question additional paid leave entitlements to cover any period the person is required to spend in quarantine or self-quarantine, presuming that person cannot carry out their duties remotely.

Where possible during an epidemic or pandemic, Life Choice will aim to provide employee with flexibility to work remotely and to attend medical appointments.

Epidemic/Pandemic Procedures

Responsibilities

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for:

- Nominating the Epidemic Officer. The normal expectation will be that the Quality & Safety Leader or workplace health and safety officer shall be appointed as Epidemic Officer, but the CEO may choose an alternative appointee.
- Ensuring that the organisation's Leave Policy and Workplace Health and Safety Policy are consistent with the intention of the Epidemic Policy
- Assessing the Life Choice's vulnerabilities and risks, in the light of the epidemic or pandemic, to:
 - o Life Choice's own human resources
 - o Life Choice's suppliers of goods and services
 - o Life Choice's participants and customers
- In the event of an epidemic or pandemic,
 - o giving notice to staff, participants, and any persons likely to be affected that epidemic or pandemic procedures are in effect
 - o bringing into operation the epidemic or pandemic management procedures specified below
 - o instituting any administrative measures necessary to reduce the impact of the vulnerabilities detailed above

Supervisors/managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that staff are aware of the epidemic procedures in effect at any time.

Staff members are responsible for:

- Abiding by the epidemic procedures specified below, when informed by authorised staff that epidemic or pandemic procedures are in effect

The epidemic officer is responsible for:

- Working with the CEO on the preparation of a comprehensive epidemic plan
- Advising the CEO on when epidemic procedures should be activated
- Familiarising staff with recommended procedures regarding epidemic avoidance
- Working with all sectors of the organisation to identify mission-critical staff and functions

Processes

The following procedures apply in the event of the CEO giving notice that epidemic or pandemic procedures are in effect.

Events

The CEO, with the advice of the epidemic officer, will consider on a continuing basis whether any events involving the attendance of staff or members of the public should be changed, rescheduled or cancelled to minimise the risk of infection.

Work procedures

The CEO, with the advice of the Epidemic Officer,

- will issue appropriate instructions to ensure all government directives dealing with epidemic practices are put into effect.
- will in addition consider on a continuing basis whether:
 - o it is necessary or appropriate for nominated staff to work from home.
 - o staff travel, (or engage in other activities that may cause them to come into contact with other people in Australia or overseas) should be modified or terminated.
 - o arrangements for staff who work with participants or the public should be modified to minimise risks for all parties.
- may require any member of staff to not attend the workplace, and/or to work from home, or, if this is not feasible or appropriate, to take paid leave.
- may require any or all staff to be appropriately vaccinated if this is necessary to protect other employees, participants, or members of the public.
- may require any member of staff to provide satisfactory evidence that they are fit to **return to work.**

Vaccinations

The CEO, with the advice of the Epidemic Officer, will consider whether the best medical advice supports requiring employees to provide information that they have received appropriate vaccinations.

The CEO, with the advice of the Epidemic Officer, will consider whether relevant direction or orders applying to the staff or the workplace requires employees to receive appropriate vaccinations.

Life Choice will consult with staff regarding the circumstances and scope of any such requirement.

Life Choice will wherever feasible allow appropriate medical exemptions to any such requirement.

Life Choice will treat all information about a staff member's vaccination as confidential and only shared on a need to know basis.

The CEO, will consider whether the protection of staff, participants, and contractors from infection may require that restrictions be placed on unvaccinated persons accessing the premises.

Contractors and suppliers

The CEO, with the advice of the epidemic officer, will consider on a continuing basis whether arrangements with existing contractors and suppliers need to be modified or supplemented to ensure uninterrupted service delivery

Health Messaging

The epidemic officer shall familiarise staff and others, as relevant, with recommended procedures on epidemic avoidance guidelines (e.g. handwashing, soap, etc) as appropriate.

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