

May 2020

COVID-19 and diver safety

This safety alert highlights the serious health and safety risks posed for occupational divers if they have been exposed to coronavirus COVID-19.

What has happened?

In the last few months we have seen the global spread of COVID-19.

Though many people may not be affected, those that are can range from being asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) to suffering from severe respiratory responses.

Incidents of respiratory distress have resulted in some people showing possible longer term damage to their lungs.

This increases the potential for serious harm to divers and highlights the importance of establishing safe medical standards for those who may have been infected with COVID-19.

What we know

A respiratory injury can cause serious harm to a diver.

Occupational divers have to pass annual medical assessments to be deemed to be medically fit.

Though there has been no formal study into the effects of COVID-19 on occupational divers, general clinical observations indicate that COVID-19:

- transmits easily from person to person
- a person may be asymptomatic but still test positive
- may not present symptoms for 10-14 days
- often shows symptoms similar to influenza
- can include serious respiratory disease such as chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma.

WorkSafe advice

Anyone with respiratory symptoms should not dive, and should arrange for COVID-19 testing. If testing is negative, they should see their GP for further advice and appropriate treatment for their symptoms.

If someone has tested positive for COVID-19 they must not dive even if they are asymptomatic.

Following clearance from the public health service any diver who has tested positive to COVID-19 should:

- seek a full diving medical from a Designated Diving Doctor, including a full respiratory assessment
- send this assessment and a completed medical questionnaire identifying COVID-19 recovery, to the Diving Hyperbaric Medicine Service (DHMS) for review by a hyperbaric medical specialist.

Diving should not commence until a new Diving Medical Clearance has been issued by the DHMS.

Any diver who has come into close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should not dive. They should also contact the public health service for further advice. No diving should be undertaken until after any isolation period has passed and the diver has sought advice from the DHMS.

Further information

[WorkSafe occupational diving guidance](#)

[List of designated diving doctors](#)

[Diving Hyperbaric Medicine Service \(DHMS\)](#)

Acknowledgement

This safety alert has been developed in consultation with Diving Industry Advisory Group hyperbaric medical specialists.