

# Article

## EMPLOYMENT LAW

### End of Year Celebrations: Tips to Stay COVID-Safe and Manage the ‘Silly Season’

By Ben Duggan & Nicholas DePasquale

It's that time of year again when employers embark upon their official end of year office celebrations.

No doubt most will wish to celebrate the end of a year scarred by the COVID-19 pandemic which forced Australia into its first recession in 20 years.

#### COVID-Safe celebrations

Employers should always take great care to ensure staff Christmas functions are conducted safely, so they avoid any nasty HR hangovers in the New Year. But, this year, they will need to take extra care to ensure everyone enjoys a COVID-Safe celebration.

Employers should consider implementing these practical measures to ensure any planned Christmas celebrations are COVID-Safe.

#### Leadership

Leaders within businesses should demonstrate best practice COVID-Safe behaviours at this year's end of year celebrations.

#### COVID Marshal

Consider the appointment of a senior member of staff to act as the COVID Marshal at the end of year celebrations.

#### COVID-Safe Plan

Ensure that your office and the host venue for your end of year celebrations have a COVID-Safe plan in place to ensure that compliance with all health directives is easy for all in attendance

#### COVID-Safe check-in

Ensure all staff scan the QR code upon entry or fill out the check-in form upon entry to comply with COVID-Safe check-in requirements.

#### Health directives

Ensure you carefully check the current health directives in order to be aware of current restrictions.

#### Unwell staff

Make it clear to your staff that if anyone is feeling unwell, they

should not attend the event, in particular, if they are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19.

#### Hygiene

Remember to stress the importance of hygiene to your staff at the end of year celebrations.

#### Food

Consider making single-serve meals available rather than the traditional buffet style shared catering to minimise the risk of transmission.

#### Event location

Consider holding your end of year celebrations at an outdoor venue for ease of compliance with social distancing protocols.

#### Event size

Ensure that the event is kept small. With the current restrictions in place, it may not be possible to have partners of staff at this year's end of year celebrations.

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### *Virtual event*

Consider the possibility of a virtual event, in particular, for those employers that have offices in multiple locations across Australia.

### **Tips to avoid the traditional end of year office celebration disaster**

Employers need to be mindful that there are still many traditional risks that need to be managed for such events.

Employers should consider implementing these practical measures to mitigate and manage the risks of staff Christmas functions.

### *Supervision*

Consider the appointment of a senior member of staff to act as the Event Manager who is responsible for ensuring that conduct at the end of year celebration is appropriate.

### *Culture*

Consider reiterating the values and beliefs of your business. This may include a reminder about the key aspects of the Code of Conduct, in particular, communicating expectations about conduct at the end of year celebration.

### *Training*

Consider scheduling a refresher training (or even new training) on anti-harassment and anti-bullying

to occur just before the end of year celebration.

### *Event details*

Employers should provide clear communication to all employees about the details for the event. This should include information on the start and finish time of the event, transport to and from the venue, dietary requirement needs, and that any continued celebrations after the scheduled finish time are not sanctioned by the employer.

### *Food and alcohol consumption*

Carefully plan the service of food and alcohol to ensure that alcohol consumption is not excessive at the end of year celebration.

### *Transport*

It is sensible to provide appropriate transport to and from the end of year celebration for all employees.

### *Reimbursement*

Consider reimbursing employees for Taxi and Uber charges if they are needed to transport employees home safely after the function.

### *The after-party*

Discourage the after-party, which should not be sanctioned by the employer.

The leaders of the employer should not attend any celebrations that occur after the scheduled finish time of the end of year function.

### *Incidents*

If any incidents arise at the end of year celebration, they should be dealt with by the employer without delay.

### *Assistance*

We hope this practical guide can help your business to avoid the Christmas Grinch and we wish you a safe, Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

If you require assistance to ensure that your Christmas function is COVID-Safe, please contact one of our employment law specialists.



**MORE INFO**

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