

Thursday 23 December 2021

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Update 61

Mask mandate returns to protect health system and book your third COVID-19 vaccination dose

Victorian COVID-19 cases on 23 December 2021: there are 14,801 active cases, including 2005 new locally acquired cases. There are 398 patients in hospital (the 7-day average is 391), including 112 in ICU (72 active), ICU (40 cleared) with 39 on ventilators. Another 10 people have died. There have been 150,094 cases and 1476 deaths since the start of the pandemic. Data links are at the end of this newsflash.

Branch Christmas closure and support over the holiday season

The ANMF office will be closed from 1pm, Friday 24 December and will re-open 8.45am, Tuesday 4 January. During this time on non-public holiday weekdays a small number of ANMF staff will monitor member assistance inquiries to ensure urgent matters receive a response. Urgent matters include terminations, APHRA notifications, violent or aggressive incidents, disciplinarys, meetings and bullying. An ANMF officer will also be on-call (except on public holidays and weekends) between 8.45 and 5pm, for urgent matters only, such as a member being dismissed. For clarity the ANMF staff on-call days are 27, 28 and 31 December.

For non-urgent matters, you may find the information you need on our [member assistance page or complete our member assistance inquiry form](#). However, **member assistance inquiries lodged within the above dates may not be responded to until after 4 January, with priority given to the most urgent.**

It has been an incredibly challenging year. Thank you to every single member for your important work caring for the Victorian community. We wish you and your loved ones a safe, peaceful and happy Christmas and a better 2022.

Andrews Government extends mask mandate to reduce hospitalisations

Acting Premier James Merlino has announced as a 'sensible measure to reduce hospitalisations' that Victorians will be required to wear masks indoors (except for in the home) from 11.59pm, Thursday 23 December 2021.

Authorised by Lisa Fitzpatrick ANMF (Vic Branch) Secretary

Masks will be required when moving around major events with more than 300,000 people, however, not when patrons are seated outdoors.

Wearing masks indoors was a recommendation of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee after considering the public health implications of the Omicron variant. Read the AHPPC statement via <https://bit.ly/33HYZXS>

Surge allowance

The majority of eligible public sector nurses and midwives are now receiving the Andrews Government's hospital surge support allowance. There have been implementation delays at some health services and others have applied a narrow eligibility approach. ANMF is urging these services to urgently implement the per shift payment which will provide an incentive for staff to fill the rosters.

ANMF negotiated this important allowance in October. The payment is applicable from 10 October 2021 to 10 February 2022 and will cost \$255 million. We continue to advocate for the extension of the allowance to private acute nurses and other groups who have undertaken public sector COVID work. We do not have agreement from the Department of Health nor the government at this stage.

The Morrison Government has heavily relied on private acute nurses to staff private aged care facilities during COVID-19 outbreaks. ANMF is seeking a commitment from Federal Aged Care Minister Greg Hunt to pay these nurses a \$60 surge allowance for every eight-hour shift. Members can read ANMF's letter (15 November 2021) to Minister Hunt via <https://bit.ly/30qgjYX>. We will update members with Minister Hunt's response.

Reduce your risk - book your third COVID-19 dose

Nurses, midwives and personal care workers are encouraged to book their third COVID-19 dose five months after your second dose. Many members received their vaccinations early in the vaccine rollout and will be due for their booster. If you received your second dose in:

- **July or earlier get your third dose in December**
- **August get your third dose in January**
- **September get your third dose in February**
- **October get your third dose in March**
- **November get your third dose in April**
- **December get your third dose in May**

The Federal Government's Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation reduced the recommended interval from six to five months in response to ongoing transmission of the Omicron and Delta variants.

Current international evidence suggests that the vaccine's protection against COVID-19 decreases over time. A third dose is important for maximum, ongoing protection against infection and serious illness.

Either Pfizer or Moderna are recommended for use as a third.

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AstraZeneca can be used if you received this vaccine for your first two doses and there were no contraindications or precautions for use or if you had a significant adverse reaction to a previous mRNA vaccine.

ATAGI says it is acceptable to co-administer a third COVID-19 vaccine dose with an influenza vaccine.

The Andrews Government is expanding its vaccination program and will spend \$31.6 million to scale up the state vaccination centres, provide pop up hubs and support GPs and pharmacies to deliver vaccinations. All residents in 178 state-run public aged care facilities will be offered a third COVID-19 vaccination dose by Christmas. The Andrews Government is also offering to assist the Federal Government roll out the third dose vaccination program in private aged care.

Book your third dose

Federal Government 'find a clinic' (chemists and medical clinics) <https://bit.ly/3Eiz7yp>

Victorian Government hubs and pop ups <https://bit.ly/3dZjuC6>

More information

ATAGI statement 12 December 2021 <https://bit.ly/3peYL2X>

ATAGI statement 28 October 2021 via <https://bit.ly/2ZuSuFY>

Federal Department of Health's vaccine booster advice <https://bit.ly/3wXoqPW>

Vaccination and younger children

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine will be available for children, aged five and 11 years, from 10 January 2022.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) provided provisional approval on 5 December. On 8 December, ATAGI recommended the use of the paediatric Pfizer vaccine for this age group.

The recommended vaccination schedule is two doses, eight weeks apart. The interval can be shortened to a minimum of three weeks in special circumstances such as an outbreak, before the start of significant immunosuppression or before international travel.

The Pfizer vaccine will be available through participating family-friendly pharmacies, general practices, Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations and some state vaccination sites. Services will be available to support children with a disability, severe anxiety or needle phobia.

Bookings

Australian Government's vaccine finder <https://bit.ly/3yGnq3i>

Family-friendly state vaccination centres <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccination-centres>

More information

COVID-19 vaccination for people with special requirements or a disability and carers via <https://bit.ly/3qdjOC1>

COVID-19 vaccination and children and teenagers <https://bit.ly/3Fl6sdu>

Movement of healthcare workers arriving in Victoria from overseas

There are testing and quarantine requirements for healthcare workers and nursing and midwifery students arriving in Victoria from overseas. The following information is from the Victorian Department of Health's 'Movement of workers during COVID-19' (6 December 2021) via <https://bit.ly/3H5uObx>

All fully vaccinated and medically exempt international arrivals must:

- undertake a PCR test within 24 hours of arrival AND
- quarantine for 72 hours AND
- undertake a further PCR test on days five to seven.

A **fully vaccinated** person aged 12 years or above who enters Victoria as an international passenger arrival (inclusive of healthcare workers) must **not attend** an educational facility, childcare or early childhood services, a residential aged care facility, a disability residential service or a hospital for **seven days** after entering Victoria **unless:**

- they have received a **negative result** from their **COVID-19 PCR** test 24 hours prior to visiting any of the above listed facilities **OR**
- they have received a **negative result** from their **COVID-19 rapid antigen test** on the day they are visiting any of the above listed facilities.

Regardless of test results, a **fully vaccinated** person cannot attend these settings while they are in quarantine.

A **fully vaccinated** person who has **not** travelled from a Commonwealth-designated 'extreme risk country' for Omicron variant of concern is required to quarantine for 72 hours and can then attend sensitive settings between Day four to seven if the above testing conditions are met.

This exception to enter sensitive settings does **not apply to medically exempt** international passenger arrivals.

Federal Government update on Omicron border restrictions (15 December 2021) <https://bit.ly/3H5jufI>

Victorian Department of Health employment advice

The Victorian Department of Health's 'Coronavirus Guidance Note on Employment-Related Matters' – provides advice on leave, including special paid leave, vaccination leave and redeployment. ANMF encourages all employers to follow this guidance, however, recognise that enforcement is limited to public sector employers only.

ANMF has secured changes to the most recently updated document to ensure that members are not financially disadvantaged as part of any COVID-related redeployment. Employers must also provide employees with write advice confirming they will return to their prior role/ duties once the COVID-related need has resolved.

The guidance, updated on 8 November 2021, can be read via <https://bit.ly/2UhDSU2>

PPE supply

As of 10 December 2021, the Victorian Department of Health advises there were: 8 million N95 respirator masks, 37 million surgical masks, 3 million visors, 3 million safety glasses, 1 million isolation gowns and 153 million gloves. PPE supply reports are available on the department's PPE information page via <https://bit.ly/3g5d96m>

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COVID clinical guidance and resources

This important page on the Department of Health's website includes information for clinical areas including alcohol and other drugs, aged care, child and family health, emergency and critical care, infection prevention and control, maternity and newborn, mental health and surgery.

<https://bit.ly/3muCNXL>

Current restrictions

Victorian Government COVIDSafe settings and restrictions <https://bit.ly/3gNFIOG>

Where can I get tested for COVID-19?

Please get tested even with the slightest of symptoms. Testing site information <https://bit.ly/2TB9eZ9>

Nurses, midwives and personal care workers should tell the person testing you that you work in health or aged care to ensure your test results are prioritised.

\$450 test and isolation payment

The Victorian Government provides a \$450 test and isolation payment to workers required to isolate after taking a COVID-19 test who don't have access to paid leave. More information, eligibility, and applications <https://bit.ly/3fWygqQ>

\$1500 disaster leave payment

The Federal Government provides a \$1500 disaster leave payment if you tested positive or were identified as a close contact and must isolate for 14 days. Private aged care workers are eligible for the payment if you do not have access to paid leave during your isolation period. Call 180 22 66 to make a claim. More information, eligibility, and applications <https://bit.ly/3bWnfXG>

Emergency accommodation for healthcare workers

The Victorian Government provides the 'frontline accommodation program' for health care workers if they need support to quarantine or isolate safely. Private aged care nurses and personal care workers are eligible to access this program. For details <https://bit.ly/2X6cABJ>

COVID-stressed?

While it may feel easier in the short term to muddle through, Nursing and Midwifery Health Program CEO and registered nurse Glenn Taylor says this coping strategy has its limitations. Members are encouraged to contact the free, confidential NMHPV service staffed predominantly by mental health nurses, as well as nurses and midwives with counselling training. One chat may help to reset and decide on some healthy strategies, or you may need ongoing support.

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Not ready to call? Reflect on your circumstances and wellbeing and fill out the NMHPV's self-care plan questionnaire via <https://bit.ly/343qHLf>. You will be emailed a self-care plan.

Contact NMHPV on 9415 7551 or email admin@nmhp.org.au. Find out more <https://www.nmhp.org.au>

Important COVID-19 links for nurses, midwives and personal care workers

ANMF continues to collate the important links all in one place, so you don't have to go looking. Please bookmark and check this page regularly – <https://anmfvic.asn.au/COVID-19>

Latest COVID-19 statistics

Victorian COVID-19 data dashboard <https://bit.ly/3j5vJwC>

Victorian Chief Health Officer daily update <https://bit.ly/34Et8Ug>

Victorian Chief Health Officer daily media release <https://bit.ly/2EDiQLb>

Victorian Government's vaccination data dashboard <https://bit.ly/319HzPg>

Federal Government national COVID-19 data <https://bit.ly/3spz67F>

Federal Government's national and aged care vaccination data <https://bit.ly/3spRSM5>

Don't bring it home: guide to minimise the risk of infection

The ANMF (Vic Branch) 'Don't bring it home' guide is designed to assist members returning home from work after a shift. Job Reps and HSRs are encouraged to download and print the 'Protocols for entering your home and minimising the risk of infection' A4 poster [PDF] via bit.ly/COVID19-DBIH

ANMF Job Reps and Health and Safety Reps are encouraged to display this newsflash on their workplace noticeboard.

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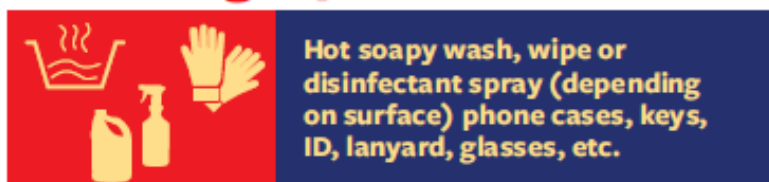


Protocols for entering your home and minimising the risk of infection.

-  **1** On entry, remove your shoes and place in a plastic box.
-  **2** Leave your bag, wallet, mobile, keys, etc in a box near the entry.
-  **3** Change out of your clothes immediately and wash them. Use the hottest possible machine wash setting and dryer if you can.
-  **4** Have a shower.
-  **5** Clean items you've brought in and surfaces you've touched.

Remember to wash your hands regularly.

Cleaning tips



Consider changing in and out of your uniform/scrubs at work.



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