

Monday 10 January 2022

## **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

### **Update #63**

### **Third vaccine dose required for health and aged care workers; surge workforce models; restrictions and testing changes in response to community transmission**

**Victorian COVID-19 cases on 10 January 2021:** there are 161,065 active cases, including 34,808 new locally acquired cases. There are 818 patients in hospital, including 118 in ICU and 28 are on ventilators. Another 2 people have died. There have been 1580 deaths since the start of the pandemic. Data links are at the end of this newsflash.

### **Branch operations**

ANMF's priority continues to be supporting members through this incredibly challenging and stressful period as the number of COVID-19 hospitalisations increases at the same time as an increasing number of nurses, midwives, personal care workers and other healthcare workers are required to furlough.

In response to the increased community transmission and the new pandemic orders, the ANMF (Vic Branch) is closed and staff are working from home to ensure we can maintain services for members.

Member meetings will take place online or be rescheduled where appropriate. ANMF is currently holding online healthcare service-wide meetings to provide members with the opportunity to raise issues and concerns.

Education Centre courses and Job Rep, HSR and occupational health and training courses will be held online, cancelled, or rescheduled. Participants are being notified directly.

### **Public sector hospital-wide members meetings**

ANMF is holding members meetings across major public sector workplaces to provide members with an opportunity to raise COVID-19, industrial, professional and occupational health and safety issues and concerns.

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These meetings will inform ANMF discussions with employers, the Department of Health and the Victorian Government.

We will also be able to advise members how to resolve local issues.

Please check your emails for meeting notices. Talk to your colleagues and ensure your ward or unit is represented so your issues can be raised.

## **Nurses, midwives and personal care workers now required to have third dose**

On 10 January 2022, Acting Chief Health Officer Professor Ben Cowie announced health and aged care workers will be required to have their third dose of the vaccine. Required vaccination deadlines will depend on the date of your eligibility.

Health Minister Martin Foley made the third dose requirement under the pandemic laws. It also applies to employees of emergency services, correctional facilities, quarantine accommodation and food distribution.

From 4 January 2022, the interval between the second and third COVID-19 vaccine dose was reduced from five to four months. The interval will change again on 31 January 2022 to three months.

ANMF encourages all members – nurses, midwives and personal care workers – to have their third dose as soon as you are eligible to ensure you are protected from severe illness, hospitalisation and death.

Public sector nurses and midwives can access up to two days special leave if symptoms after receiving your vaccine prevent you from attending work. The public sector enterprise agreement personal leave evidence requirements apply.

Your deadline will depend on your eligibility and your second dose deadline:

**12 February 2022 deadline** – nurses, midwives and carers who are eligible for a third dose on or before 12 January.

**1 March 2022 deadline** – residential aged care nurses and personal carer workers who are not yet eligible for their third dose must have it within three months and two weeks of the second dose deadline which was 15 November 2021.

**29 March 2022 deadline** – nurses and midwives working in hospitals and healthcare services who are not yet eligible for their third dose must have it within three months and two weeks of the second dose deadline which was 15 December 2021.

**Medical exemptions** – as previously if you are unable to be vaccinated due to medical issues you will be required to provide evidence to your employer from an authorised medical practitioner. This evidence must be from one of the following:

1. a general practice registrar on an approved 3GA training placement
2. a public health physician
3. an infectious disease physician
4. a clinical immunologist
5. gynaecologist
6. obstetrician
7. a GP who is vocationally registered
8. a GP who is a fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

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9. a GP who is a fellow of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Your GP will be able to advise you if they meet one of the above criteria.

### **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>

## **Hospital and aged care visitor restrictions**

Health Minister Martin Foley has introduced changes to the vaccination and testing requirements for visitors to hospitals and aged care facilities.

### **Hospital visitors**

Visitors to hospitals must have received two doses of the vaccine or must return a negative rapid antigen test (RAT) result before entering. Adult visitors who are not fully vaccinated must wear an N95 mask during their visit. Standard face masks continue to be mandated for children aged 8 years and above.

### **Aged care facility visitors**

Residents at aged care facilities are still able to have up to five visitors per day. Visitors must return a negative RAT before entering. If no RATs are available at the facility, only two visitors are permitted.

## **Changes to restrictions to ease rate of community transmission**

On 10 January, Health Minister Martin Foley announced further restrictions and changes to slow the community transmission of COVID-19 and reduce the pressure on our acute health services, our nurses, midwives and personal care workers and other essential services and supply chains.

Changes include third dose requirements for critical frontline workers, hospital and aged care visitor vaccination and testing requirements and a strong recommendation to work from home where possible.

These are in addition to a pause on non-urgent elective surgery, testing and reporting requirements for Victorians and density limits for businesses.

Daniel Andrews extended Victoria's pandemic declaration from 11.59pm, Wednesday 12 January for a further three months.

### **Victorian Government media releases**

'Keeping Victorian Workers in key sectors safe' (10 January 2022) <https://bit.ly/3GaO73d>

New pandemic declaration to support Omicron response (9 January 2022) <https://bit.ly/3qZNJ17>

'Nine easy questions for rapid COVID response' (7 January) via <https://bit.ly/3qVnVmH>

'Sensible steps to reduce testing queues and transmission' (6 January 2022) via <https://bit.ly/3n39yvy>

'Changes to non-urgent surgery settings helping hospitals respond to Omicron' (5 January 2022) <https://bit.ly/3n5Nz7h>

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## Furloughing and stage 3 and stage 4 surge workforce models

ANMF is hopeful the changes and new restrictions, introduced under the new pandemic laws, will slow the rate of community transmission causing the simultaneous furlough of thousands of nurses, midwives, personal care workers and a rise in COVID-19 hospitalisations.

These staff shortages are leading to more hospitals moving to the surge workforce models. While these models are designed to protect patient safety in the most extraordinary circumstances they will be challenging for members. They will not be in place for a day longer than necessary.

The Department of Health's intensive care and acute care (emergency departments, urgent care centres, maternity services and mental health) surge workforce model guidance provides team models of care, in the context of a workforce shortfall, for moderate, severe, extreme and acute surge scenarios.

ANMF was involved in the Victorian Department of Health's consultation last year to revise the surge workforce models to ensure the health system can meet the expected demand. The planning for this work occurred in 2020 in preparation for wave two, but thankfully was not needed.

These are not normal times, and under the models the workforce may look different if forecast hospitalisation peaks become a reality. Stage 3 (extreme) and 4 (acute) surge models will be extremely challenging and are only to be used as options of last resort.

The surge workforce plans were discussed with Job Reps and Health and Safety Reps at ANMF's statewide meeting on 14 October 2021 in anticipation that health services would move to moderate, severe, extreme and acute surge extended team models of care.

Health services must notify the department if they are intending to move to a stage 3 (extreme) or 4 (acute surge) model. To implement an alternative model of team care – led by nurses and midwives - a health service must demonstrate it has exhausted all recruitment avenues. ANMF's advocacy has ensured that consultation with ANMF and your Job Reps and Health and Safety Reps, must occur at local workplaces where the model is to be introduced prior to its introduction. The department is required to consult with ANMF if a health service plans to implement a model that does not align with the guidance.

The consultation ANMF secured as part of the process means the union and members can have absolute confidence that health services are doing everything they can to staff wards/units prior to notifying the Department of Health that a surge workforce model is required, for a period of time, whilst the surge is occurring.

Acutely aware of the significant pressures on our members, a number of ANMF nursing and midwifery staff are working shifts on their days off to assist fatigued nurses and midwives. Elected officials also continue to volunteer on their days off to assist.

ANMF continues to work with the department to ensure all strategies are implemented to recruit and retain nurses and midwives and maintain ratios. We are particularly encouraging part-time nurses and midwives to increase their planned rostered hours rather than accepting exhausting double shifts.

The upskilling of current staff, the student employment model (Registered Undergraduate Students of Nursing – RUSONs and Registered Undergraduate Students of Midwifery RUSOMs), furloughing guidance, vaccination (of the workforce and the community), infection and prevention control, the supplementary testing and vaccination workforce, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia sub-pandemic register, ANMF's reorientation to acute care course, the hospital support surge allowance, adjusting shift lengths, rostering patterns to optimise rest

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periods, increased breaks for those wearing tier 3 PPE, wellbeing supports and additional de-brief opportunities are all important strategies to protect nurses and midwives, patients and models of care.

## Hospital support surge allowance

ANMF negotiated the per shift hospital support surge allowance to acknowledge the work of frontline nurses and midwives working with patients. It is also designed to be an incentive to fill rosters for wards and units under extreme pressure.

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 beyond 10 February, and to extend eligibility 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.

ANMF is also seeking a commitment from Federal Aged Care Minister Greg Hunt to pay private acute nurses, who assist private aged care facilities experiencing an outbreak, 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/30qqjYX>. Minister Hunt is yet to respond.

Members experiencing any issues with this payment should email [hssa@anmfvic.asn.au](mailto:hssa@anmfvic.asn.au)

## How to report a positive rapid antigen test

As of 9 January 2022, it is now mandatory to report a positive rapid antigen test to the Department of Health. These cases will be reported in the daily statistics alongside confirmed cases.

Notification can be via an online form available at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/report> or call the Coronavirus Hotline on [1800 675 398](tel:1800675398).

Victorians with symptoms and their close contacts can still get a free PCR test if they don't have access to RAT. Testing centres are also starting to provide RAT tests instead of a PCR test.

In the coming weeks, PCR tests will be reserved for confirmation of clinical diagnoses in vulnerable settings and critical workforce testing.

## Definitions for contacts of COVID-19 positive cases

The Victorian Government has recently changed the definitions of contacts. The quarantine and isolation rules are different depending on the type of contact you are.

- 1. A household contact or household-like contact** is someone who has spent more than four hours in a house, care facility or accommodation with a person who has tested positive during their infectious period. **A household contact or household-like contact must quarantine for seven days** and follow the Department of health's testing directions. You must get tested on Day 1 of quarantine (or as soon as possible) and get tested again on Day 6 of quarantine – with a rapid antigen test, or a PCR test if you can't access a rapid antigen test. If you test positive on a RAT, you must report your result via an online form at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/report> or call the Coronavirus Hotline on [1800 675 398](tel:1800675398)

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2. **A social contact** is someone who has had 15 minutes of face-to-face contact with or spent 2 hours with a person has tested positive, in the same indoor place. Once notified by the positive person, you must test and isolate until you get the result.
3. Other contacts are a work or education facility contact – you will be contacted by your work or education facility and advised of the testing requirements.

**The infectious period** determines who is a household or social contact. The infectious period is defined as:

- **two days prior to the appearance of symptoms** - if the COVID positive person has symptoms
- **two days before the day you got tested** - if the COVID positive person does not have symptoms

The Victorian Government's COVID-19 website provides the following examples:

- If you first noticed symptoms on Friday afternoon, your infectious period is all of Wednesday onwards (i.e. two days before Friday).
- If you didn't have any symptoms prior to your test, and you were tested on Friday afternoon (regardless of when you received your positive result), your infectious period is all of Wednesday onwards.

Further information about these definitions, testing, reporting a test, quarantine and isolation requirements, testing positive and notifying close contacts is available via <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-contacts>

The furloughing guidelines for health services are complex and evolving. ANMF has summarised the guidance in a separate newsflash.

## **P2/N95 mask fit testing every 12 months**

ANMF continues to encourage all nurses, midwives and personal care workers to participate in their workplace fit testing program as a matter of urgency to ensure you, your family and your patients, clients and residents are protected. If you are a new employee fit testing a P2/N95 mask should have been part of your induction.

Each P2/N95 mask fit test takes between 45 and 90 minutes to complete and requires specialist equipment and an appropriately skilled person to conduct the fit test.

Staff need to be retested at least every 12 months or sooner if different masks are in use. If this is not happening in your workplace ANMF advises members to complete a VHIMS or incident report and complete an online ANMF member assistance form via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance>

Irrespective of fit testing, fit checking should be undertaken every time someone puts a P2/N95 respirator on. If the appropriate fit is not achieved, the respirator is not providing adequate protection. In these circumstances someone who can achieve an appropriate fit should undertake the procedure or delay the procedure until an appropriate fit can be achieved. Read the WorkSafe Victoria advice via <https://bit.ly/3ddwqRT>

## 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 (including two days if you are unwell after your third dose)** 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 written 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>

## 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>

## 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>

## How to access ANMF support

Members can complete an online Member Assistance inquiry form via [anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance](https://anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance) (scroll to the bottom of the page).

## 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.

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](mailto:admin@nmhp.org.au). Find out more <https://www.nmhp.org.au>

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## 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

A reminder that ANMF (Vic Branch) has developed a guide to assist you in relation to returning home from work after a shift.

Job Reps and HSRs are encouraged to print the poster which is part of this PDF newsflash. You can also download the 'Protocols for entering your home and minimising the risk of infection' A4 poster via [bit.ly/COVID19-DBIH](https://bit.ly/COVID19-DBIH)

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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

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- Hot soapy wash, wipe or disinfectant spray (depending on surface) phone cases, keys, ID, lanyard, glasses, etc.**

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