

Tuesday 12 July 2022

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

### **Update #73**

### **ATAGI's fourth vaccine advice, close contact rule changes and 'stay well in winter' community campaign to ease pressure on hospitals**

#### **COVID data**

On Tuesday 12 July there are 10,627 new COVID cases and 57,381 active cases. There are 737 people with COVID-19 in hospital. There are 39 patients in ICU, including 7 on a ventilator. Sixteen people died. Of those eligible (16+), 68.8% have had 3 vaccine doses which is up slightly. There are 1828 public healthcare workers furloughed (private sector figures are not available). More COVID-19 data via <https://bit.ly/3c3zkgw>

#### **Mask wearing 'strongly recommended' in the community**

Victorians are being advised to wear masks indoors and crowded settings to protect themselves in winter.

The strong recommendation is part of the Victorian Government's new 'stay well in winter' community engagement campaign. Messaging includes renewed advice for Victorians to take COVID seriously and implement the well-known measures to protect themselves, their families and the healthcare system.

At every opportunity ANMF continues to remind the community and the media that wearing a mask will slow the transmission of COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses. Wearing a mask is also a sign people understand the pressure on our health system and workforce and are supporting nurses, midwives and healthcare workers.

Victorian Government media release 'COVID advice for Victorians to stay well in winter' 12 July 2022 via <https://bit.ly/3c5h1km>

## Recent cases close contact rules change

The Victorian Government will change the rules for recently confirmed cases from 11.59pm, Tuesday 12 July 2022.

People who have recently recovered from COVID-19 are exempt from testing and isolation/quarantine requirements for four weeks, down from 12 weeks. This reflects emerging evidence about the new COVID-19 variants and re-infection.

The new rules align Victoria with the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice about the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants. Read the AHPPC statement via <https://bit.ly/3NZy7nC>

Positive cases will still be required to isolate for seven days from the day they took their test. They are still able to drive a household member to work, education or a health appointment. An additional reason to leave home has been added – to provide transport for a household member to obtain food, if essential. The COVID-19 positive person must remain in the car and wear a face covering at all times.

Household close contact rules <https://bit.ly/3OdHAIp>

## New fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose recommendations

The expert committee advising the Federal Government on COVID-19 vaccines has updated its fourth dose recommendation to include adults aged 50 to 64 years.

Adults aged 30 to 49 can also receive a winter booster COVID-19 vaccine dose, however the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation says the ‘benefit for people in this age group is less certain’.

Read the 7 July 2022 ATAGI statement via <https://bit.ly/3yUk8eG>

If eligible you can receive a fourth dose three months after your third dose or after having a COVID infection that has occurred after your third dose.

Free COVID vaccines are available at vaccination hubs, pharmacies and GPs.

Fourth dose booking information <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/get-vaccinated>

## Can I access leave to have the fourth dose?

Public sector members can access:

- four hours special paid leave to have the vaccine (including travel time)
- two days special paid leave if you are unwell following the vaccine.

The Victorian Department of Health’s guidance states employers should give consideration to extending these entitlements to public sector casual employees.

These entitlements are included in the Victorian Department of Health’s ‘Coronavirus Guidance Note on Employment-Related Matters’ – which provides advice on leave, including special paid leave, vaccination leave and redeployment. This **guidance (updated 26 May 2022)** is available via <https://bit.ly/2UhDSU2>.

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ANMF strongly encourages local government, private and not-for-profit employers to follow the Victorian Department of Health's special paid leave guidance, but it is not enforceable.

## Working from home

The Victorian Government is encouraging employers to consider working from home arrangements where appropriate to slow the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

Most ANMF staff will work predominantly from home for the remainder of July, and at this stage much of August, to ensure we can maintain a workforce able to support our members.

## Free respiratory clinics – spread the word

Members are encouraged to spread the word to family and friends about the more than 50 free respiratory clinics across Victoria designed to ease the pressure on emergency departments and GP medical clinics.

These clinics:

1. are for people that are unwell with mild respiratory symptoms (such as coughing, runny nose, fever) or other COVID-19 symptoms (such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea)
2. offer face-to-face assessments (including testing) and immediate support for respiratory illnesses (such as influenza, COVID-19, asthma, hay fever)
3. provide care for people with COVID-19, including by telehealth (can be accessed even if you do not live close by to the clinic)
4. are staffed by general practitioners and nurses
5. are free for everyone (babies, children and adults), with or without a Medicare card.

### Locations and appointment information

- North Western Melbourne <https://bit.ly/3NZWe5F>
- South Eastern Melbourne <https://bit.ly/3yXl8hY>
- Eastern / North Eastern Melbourne <https://bit.ly/3OZ5kBa>
- Gippsland <https://bit.ly/3yWvvTi>
- Western Victoria <https://bit.ly/3yXiySi>
- Murray (Central Victoria, Goulburn Valley, North East and North West Victoria) <https://bit.ly/3z7rtYB>

New clinics are also expected to open soon in Mildura and Warnambool.

More information, including an interactive location map via <https://bit.ly/3yABbRu>  
Victorian Government media release 'More GP respiratory clinics to ease pressure on hospitals', 5 July 2022 via <https://bit.ly/3P7aATq>

## Early treatment: antiviral medicines access expanded

The Federal Government has expanded access to antiviral medicines to reduce severe symptoms and hospitalisation:

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- all Australians aged 70 years and over.
- people aged 50 years and over, with two or more risk factors for severe disease
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 30 years
- immunocompromised people aged over 18 may also be eligible.

To be effective, antivirals need to be taken in the first five days of COVID-19 symptoms. Eligible people are encouraged to discuss their plan with their GP ahead of time, so they are prepared if they test positive to COVID.

Antivirals can be accessed via your GP or a GP respiratory clinic. Patients will be provided with a prescription or referred to a hospital if that is more appropriate.

More COVID-19 medicines information via <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covid-19-medicines>  
Federal Health Minister media release 'Millions of Australians to gain access to COVID treatments', 11 July 2022, via <https://bit.ly/3IsWmcZ>

## Workers compensation claim reminder

If you test positive to COVID-19 or believe you have been impacted psychologically, ANMF strongly recommends you make a WorkCover claim. Read COVID-19 update 66 for details <https://bit.ly/3fOtBtB>

## P2/N95 mask fit testing

All nurses, midwives and personal care workers should 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 30 and 45 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 **WorkSafe Victoria's 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 fourth dose)** and redeployment. ANMF encourages all employers to follow this guidance, however, recognise that enforcement is limited to public sector employers only.

Read the guidance, updated on 26 May 2022, via <https://bit.ly/2UhDSU2>

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## Need ANMF advice or 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 for the button).

## COVID-19 stressed? You're only human

The pandemic marathon continues. If the rising winter cases are causing you stress, anxiety or trauma please consider contacting the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria. The NMHPV is run by nurses and midwives who understand what you are going through. Don't wait until you hit crisis point before you seek help.

Phone 9415 7551 (business hours) or email [admin@nmhp.org.au](mailto:admin@nmhp.org.au)

*(Please note the NMHPV is a counselling support service, they cannot provide employment advice – for this advice complete an ANMF member assistance form.)*

## 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>

## Got a colleague not receiving ANMF emails?

Let them know they can re-subscribe via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/resubscribe>

## Encourage your colleagues to join ANMF

Let them know they can join via <https://www.anmfvic.asn.au/join>

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

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