

Wednesday 12 October 2022

COVID-19 Update #75

Pandemic Orders end 12 October 2022

Workplace Order (No. 10) commenced on 12 July 2022 and ends at 11:59pm on 12 October 2022.

The above order amalgamated various COVID related requirements into a single Order, including the earlier COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination (Specified Facilities) Order 2022 (No. 7) which was revoked on 22 April 2022.

With the expiry of Workplace Order (No. 10), and no replacement Order, there is no longer any orders made under Part 8A of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.

The information below is correct to the best of our understanding and inquiries but may be the subject of further updates.

What does this mean?

It means there is no longer a government-imposed requirement for vaccination against COVID-19.

For those in the public health sector (including public sector residential aged care) the private acute sector, Ambulance Victoria and the patient transport sector the 'order' will be replaced by a Direction made by the Secretary of the Department of Health.

The Directions will be enacted on 13 October 2022 as interim Directions, to continue vaccination requirements while the Department consults on the parameters of enduring Secretary Directions.

This is similar to the Direction requiring current and newly commencing healthcare workers be vaccinated for seasonal influenza annually by 15 August.

The Direction will be accompanied by 'Policy guidance for healthcare settings', which will repeat previous exceptions and exemptions for vaccination:

- a worker who cannot be fully vaccinated because they are a recent confirmed or probable COVID-19 case will be exempt until eligible for a third dose

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- a worker who is not yet eligible for their “most up to date” dose will use their immunisation history and current ATAGI guidance as evidence that they are not yet eligible for that dose.

What if a further vaccination dose is recommended by ATAGI?

The Directions will stipulate that to be ‘up to date’ with vaccination you need to be compliant with the latest ATAGI advice.

More information can be found via <https://bit.ly/3RVKVO3>

What about Forensicare?

Section 342 of the Mental Health Act 2014 allows the Minister for Mental Health to issue written directions to Forensicare that the Minister is satisfied are necessary. This includes issuing Ministerial Directions requiring healthcare workers employed or contracted by Forensicare to be vaccinated against specified vaccine-preventable diseases. The only vaccine required for Forensicare via Ministerial Directions is influenza, annually by 15 August 2022. However, the Secretary’s Direction applies to Forensicare staff in respect to COVID vaccination.

Volunteers and students

Volunteers and students are not subject to Directions; however, a healthcare setting can reasonably require that volunteers and students meet certain vaccination requirements prior to commencing roles or placements within the setting.

What applies in residential aged care and disability care?

This Direction does not extend to private residential aged care, or private disability care. The law under which the Direction is made does not extend into these areas.

It isn’t known at this stage what, if anything, will apply from a State or Federal Government, or Commonwealth Health Department perspective after 12 October.

It is open to individual employers to have policies to protect the health and safety of staff, residents and visitors, and these policies may extend to vaccination requirements. These policies should be developed in consultation with elected health and safety representatives.

What applies in community settings?

The current Pandemic Order applies in primary care and community-based healthcare settings (both public and private). The Directions however will only apply to community healthcare settings that are operated by public healthcare services and will not apply in primary care and private community healthcare settings.

It is open to individual employers to have policies to protect the health and safety of staff, clients and visitors, and these policies may extend to vaccination requirements. These policies should be developed in consultation with elected health and safety representatives.

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Do I still have to isolate?

The Pandemic (Quarantine, Isolation and Testing) Order 2022 (No. 11) also expires on 12 October 2022.

While isolation rules have been relaxed within the general community, it is still a requirement for health workers to isolate, and in the public sector at least, special paid leave remains available for isolation.

The decision to relax isolation rules will **not** apply to “vulnerable settings” which means, for example, that health and aged care workers may need to isolate for 7 days, with the potential to return to work on Day 5 if asymptomatic and returning a negative RAT.

Once we are able to confirm how this applies, we will provide a further update.

What about PPE?

There is no change to PPE settings, although ANMF is aware that some health services that were exceeding the minimum PPE requirements are now reverting to the minimum.

Acute and sub-acute health care sector in Victoria

Tier 1: non COVID patient, settings that are not used for COVID care	Tier 1 PPE: surgical mask, other items as per standard precautions
Tier 2: COVID patient, COVID care settings. Non-patient interaction or clinical interactions > 1.5m	Tier 2 PPE: P2/N95, eye protection with patient facing interactions
Tier 3: COVID patient, COVID care settings- clinical/personal care	Tier 3 PPE: gloves, gown, P2/N95 and eye protection

Residential aged care

Tier 1: residents who are not in quarantine or isolation, training rooms and staff amenities. Exception: when required by specific guidance	Tier 1 PPE: surgical mask, other items as per standard precautions
Tier 2: residents who are in quarantine i.e. contacts who are not symptomatic and not tested positive, when working in amber zones	Tier 2 PPE: P2/N95, eye protection with patient facing interactions

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Tier 3: residents who are in isolation (suspected and confirmed) and red zones.	Tier 3 PPE: gloves, gown, P2/N95 and eye protection
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Primary and community health services in Victoria

Community health centres, visiting services provided in residential dwellings, GPs, schools- sick bays, outpatient mental health facilities, detention and correctional facilities

Lower risk interaction: client is negative or has no clinical or epidemiological risk factors	Tier 1 PPE: surgical mask, other items as per standard precautions
Medium risk interaction: client may be an identified contact and does not have symptoms consistent with COVID	Tier 2 PPE: P2/N95, eye protection with patient facing interactions
Highest risk interaction: client risk is unknown or cannot be assessed, suspected case, confirmed case	Tier 3 PPE: gloves, gown, P2/N95 and eye protection
PPE tiers generally correlates with acute setting except eye protection when there is a risk of contamination with respiratory secretions, blood or body fluid splash vs any patient facing interactions for acute setting	

Need ANMF advice or support?

Complete an online Member Assistance inquiry form via anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance

COVID-19 stressed? You're only human

The free, confidential Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria is run by nurses and midwives and provides support, counselling and referral. Learn more via <https://nmhp.org.au>. Phone 9415 7551 (business hours) or email admin@nmhp.org.au

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are encouraged to display this newsflash on their workplace noticeboard.**

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