

Wednesday 30 March 2022

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Update #72

Surge allowance ends, ATAGI's fourth vaccine advice and flu vaccine

Hospital surge support allowance ends

After almost 25 weeks, the Andrews Government's hospital surge support allowance will end on Thursday 31 March 2022. The payment was introduced on 11 October 2021 and was initially scheduled to end on 10 February 2022.

On 2 February, following an online meeting of ANMF Job Reps with Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews to discuss the COVID outbreak and pressure on health services, the government extended the per shift allowance until 31 March.

ANMF negotiated the \$30 and \$60 (depending on zone) per shift allowance with the Andrews Government as part of preparations for the expected patient surge and the consequential difficulties anticipated around surge models, redeployment and other strategies. The aim was to provide a fair payment for nurses and midwives working in patient-facing roles in the acute clinical areas caring for the surge of patients over summer. The allowance was also designed as an incentive for nurses and midwives to return from the vaccination hubs and testing sites, to work additional shifts and to encourage those recently retired to return to the acute workforce.

Private acute hospital nurses caring for public COVID-19 patients at a number of facilities also received the payment. Despite strong advocacy, other private acute hospital employers and the Morrison Government, which is responsible for the private aged care sector, refused to pay the allowance to their nurses, midwives and personal care workers.

Victoria is the only state to implement an additional COVID allowance for nurses and midwives. It cost \$340 million.

Almost all health services have now exited surge models and ceased wholesale redeployment. Some sense of normality is expected before the end of March 2022 and the cessation of the surge allowance.

The end of the surge models also means a return to the scheduled ratio improvements in March and July as required by the two *Safe Patient Care Act* amendments. (For ratio improvement detail from 2019 to 2023 see <https://anmfvic.asn.au/ratiotimeline>)

Authorised by Lisa Fitzpatrick ANMF (Vic Branch) Secretary

A small number of public sector health service wards are yet to cease surge workforce models and will be required to do this by 1 April if they do not have a local agreement with the ANMF.

ANMF will consult with our affected members prior to reaching any local agreement for a limited period of time.

ATAGI recommends targeted fourth COVID vaccine winter dose

The expert panel advising the Federal Government about the COVID-19 vaccine has recommended a fourth dose for vulnerable groups. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) says these groups are:

- adults aged 65 years and older
- residents of aged care or disability care facilities
- people aged 16 years and older who are severely immunocompromised
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and older.

The fourth dose can be given from four months or longer after the person first received their third dose or from four months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection, if the infection occurred since the person's third dose.

ATAGI says the influenza vaccine can be co-administered with the fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Pfizer or Moderna are the preferred vaccines for the fourth COVID-19 winter dose. AstraZeneca can be used when an mRNA vaccine is contraindicated or a person declines vaccination with an mRNA vaccine. Novavax can be used if no other COVID-19 vaccine is considered suitable for that person.

Victorian state-run vaccine hubs are now taking bookings from eligible people for the fourth dose. Fourth doses will be available from GPs, pharmacies and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health organisations from 1 April.

ATAGI statement (25 March 2022) <https://bit.ly/3DmbPJm>

Victorian government fourth dose information and state vaccination hub bookings via <https://bit.ly/3IOIPLI> or call 1800 675 398.

2022 influenza vaccine

ANMF anticipates that the 2022 influenza vaccination will be mandatory for health workers this year, with an announcement imminent.

Nurses and midwives typically reach around 93% influenza vaccination uptake each year, so this is unlikely to present any difficulty for our members.

ANMF will work with members who cannot be vaccinated against influenza, members with any concerns should contact our Member Assistance Team in the first instance via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance> (scroll to the bottom of the page to submit an inquiry 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>

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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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