

VAHPA says NO to putting HCWs and patients at risk by forcing HCWs out of isolation!

Position statement on close contact & COVID-19 positive isolation rules.

The Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) has drawn a line in the sand, warning that healthcare workers (HCW) must not be brought out of isolation if they have tested positive to COVID-19 until they have observed the minimum 7-day isolation period. Further, VAHPA does not support the reduction in the furloughing requirement for close contacts. Household close contacts, even if asymptomatic, should only return to work after their 7-day isolation period has been completed and only after producing serial negative Rapid Antigen Test results to ensure they are not infected.

With the current disastrous exponential growth in COVID-19 infections across Victoria, the health system has come under further unprecedented but not unpredicted pressure. Emergency departments are overflowing with patients, the increasing demand for hospital admissions exceeds bed capacity resulting in thousands of patients being cared for at home, primary care settings are swamped, and the Victorian Ambulance Service is overwhelmed, evidenced by the recent 'code reds' in metropolitan Melbourne.

HCWs have borne the brunt of this pandemic with each successive wave taking a cumulative toll on their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. In 2020 there were 4,171 HCW infected with COVID-19, with up to 80% of these infections acquired in the workplace. A further 5,843 HCWs were infected in 2021 despite improved PPE standards and vaccinations. As a consequence of increasing work pressures and poor working conditions record numbers of HCWs are resigning or leaving their professions for work in other industries, exacerbating the workforce crisis existent pre pandemic.

It is unreasonable to be forcing HCWs to shortcut the public health isolation requirements when they are close contacts. It is unacceptable and unsafe to expect HCWs who have tested positive to COVID-19 but are asymptomatic, to return to work before the requisite 7-day isolation period has been observed, regardless of intermittent testing. The risk posed to the individual of exacerbating their condition, the risk to their colleagues and the risk to their patients is simply NOT acceptable.

VAHPA will support Allied Health Professionals to reject any move to reduce the isolation requirements for COVID positive healthcare workers through whatever industrial, regulatory and legal processes available.

Authorised by Andrew Hewat, Assistant Secretary Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association