

ANMF Newsflash: COVID-19 Advice

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) have received enquiries from members regarding their right to transfer to a lower risk clinical environment for a variety of reasons during the COVID-19 pandemic. On 30 March 2020, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice to National Cabinet was that special provisions be applied to vulnerable people in the workplace.

Until recently, there has been some confusion regarding the exact definition of 'vulnerable people' in the context of COVID-19. The AHPPC recommendations have now provided clarity.

The AHPPC considers that, based on the limited current evidence, the following people are, or are likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they are infected with the virus:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. Conditions included in the definition of 'chronic medical conditions' will be refined as more evidence emerges. The most current list can be accessed on the Department of Health website here: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19>
- People 70 years and older
- People with compromised immune systems (see Department of Health website above)
- There is currently limited evidence regarding the risk in pregnant women.

The AHPPC recommends that where vulnerable workers undertake essential work, a risk assessment must be undertaken. Risk needs to be assessed and mitigated with consideration of the characteristics of the worker, the workplace and the work. This includes ensuring vulnerable people are redeployed to non-customer-based roles where possible. Where risk cannot be appropriately mitigated, employers and employees should consider alternate arrangements to accommodate a workplace absence.

The AHPPC recommends that essential workers who are at higher risk of serious illness, where the risk cannot be sufficiently mitigated, should not work in high risk settings.

In essence this means that any nurse, midwife or care worker that fits the above criteria of being at higher risk of illness, for example immunosuppressed as well as pregnant (under the transfer to a safe job), should be offered alternate work environments if they are likely to be working in a high risk area for COVID-19 (e.g. a hot area or COVID-19 clinic, etc.). Alternatively, where possible work from home should be supported. Advice is available here:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-advice-to-national-cabinet-on-30-march-2020>

If you have any concerns regarding support from your employer with respect to transferring to a safe working environment, please contact our Member Support Team via email membersupport@anmftas.org.au or call (03) 6223 6777 or 1800 001 241 (if outside Hobart). Due to COVID-19 the Team are now practicing social isolation and working from home, baring this in mind, email is the preferred and fastest way of contacting them.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, Branch Secretary

2 April 2020