

ANMF Newsflash: COVID-19 Update

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) have been responding to a number of COVID-19 member concerns and can provide the below update to a number of frequently asked questions.

I have been identified as a close contact can I return to work?

The ANMF were asked for feedback on the Department of Health policy *COVID-19 DoH Workers who are Close Contacts to Continue to Work, Subject to Conditions* on Friday 7 January 2022, noting that some members had already been asked to return to work as a close contact. The ANMF broadly did not support close contacts returning to the workplace, however, are aware that the policy has since been implemented.

The policy can be accessed here:

<https://anmftas.org.au/pdf/COVID19DoHWorkerswhoareCloseContacts.pdf>

Attachment 2:

<https://anmftas.org.au/pdf/Attachment2.pdf>

If you are identified as a close contact, you will be required to isolate for 7 days. However, if you are deemed a 'critical worker' by your manager (which will largely relate to staffing requirements) you may be provided an exemption to attend work as a close contact. This exemption cannot be granted by your NUM, it will need to be signed off by the Regional Commander. You will be required to undertake a RAT prior to each shift.

What happens if I test positive when I am a close contact and attending work?

If you test positive taking a RAT prior to a shift, you must immediately isolate and not attend work. The Department of Health today have confirmed that any staff member who tests positive will not be required to enter the workplace.

What are my leave entitlements if I have been identified as a close contact?

If you have been identified as a close contact and directed to isolate and cannot work from home, you are able to access COVID-19 special leave. However, you may be contacted and requested to return to work as per the above process.

What if I don't want to want to attend work as a close contact?

You do not have to return to work if you are a close contact and requested to return by your employer. However, if you choose to remain at home as a close contact and not return to work if requested to by your employer, you will then have to access your own personal leave to remain at home.

What if I test positive to COVID-19 and cannot attend work?

If you test positive, the ANMF would encourage you to submit a workers compensation claim as due to the lack of contact tracing and the number of cases in Tasmania is entirely likely that you may have contracted COVID-19 in your workplace. If you do not submit a workers compensation (WC) claim you will be required to access your own personal (sick) leave if you are unwell and unable to work. If you do not make an application for WC and run out of personal leave you can then also access COVID-19 special leave.

I am concerned about depleting my sick leave due to COVID-19 and not having any left for other illness:

The ANMF have raised this concern with the Department of Health and the State Service Management Office and requested an increase to the COVID-19 special leave. This has not been supported but a commitment was made that if an employee exhausts sick leave and COVID-19 special leave then individual assessments for an extension of special leave will be considered. In addition, if you exhaust your personal leave due to COVID-19 and are unwell for another reason special leave can be applied for and ANMF are able to support you in this process if required.

I am feeling exhausted, fatigued and picking up extra shifts and feel undervalued:

The ANMF recognise this and have directly approached the Premier to seek his endorsement for a COVID-19 allowance for all public sector nurses and midwives. A response to this request has been sought by close of business Tuesday 11 January 2021. Members will be advised of a response.

Due to escalation level 3, I only get the chance to have a drink 1-2 times per shift:

The ANMF have sought approval from the Department of Health to consider an additional 15-minute hydration and comfort for all nurses and midwives and a response to this response is anticipated on Tuesday 11 January 2022, which will be communicated to members.

Our workloads are challenging, and we are working down staff on shifts:

The ANMF are aware that workloads and staffing is becoming increasingly challenging. The ANMF also recognise that safe staffing is increasingly being achieved through double shifts and overtime. The ANMF have met today with Chief Executive of Hospitals and Executive Directors of Nursing and requested a meeting to discuss a more sustainable staffing strategy to support members wellbeing. These meetings are to be arranged and the ANMF will update members on outcomes.

However, if you are experiencing significant and sustainable workload and are concerned about staffing, please contact the ANMF so we can support you in addressing these.

The ANMF Tasmanian Branch is 8000 plus members strong! Supporting nurses, midwives, and care workers as the only union in Tasmania employing nurses and care workers to represent members. This is why our Organisers and Member Support Team are uniquely positioned to understand your experiences, represent you in your workplace, and offer industrial advice that's relevant to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact our Member Support Team via email on membersupport@anmftas.org.au. Email is the preferred and fastest way of contacting the team. Alternatively, you can phone (03) 6223 6777 or 1800 001 241 if outside Hobart.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, Branch Secretary

10 January 2022