

ANMF COVID-19 Newsflash:

The Hobart Clinic

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) wrote to The Hobart Clinic (THC) management to seek an update on information in relation to your workplace and their response to the current Omicron COVID-19 situation in the Tasmanian community. Specifically, the ANMF has asked of your employer the following questions *in italics*, and response from your employer **in bold**.

Please note that this is the information that the facility has provided us, *if the answers below are contradictory to what you are experiencing, please advise the ANMF via our member support team so we can take further action with the facility.*

1. *Could you please provide details on the strategies implemented to reduce transmission of the Omicron strain in your facility/facilities? Or alternatively, please feel free to provide a copy of your outbreak management plan.*

THC has the following processes in place for reducing transmission of the Omicron strain at THC, they are:

- a. Pandemic Management Framework**
- b. Worksafe Tasmania – COVID-19 plan**
- c. COVID-19 Management Procedure**
- d. Infection Control framework and procedures**
- e. Outbreak Management procedure**
 - **These processes include but not limited to the following:**
 - o COVID-19 screening for all staff and patients, visitors, and contractors on entry**
 - o Patients, visitors, contractors are required to use the Check-In Tas app on entry**

- o All Contractors who provide goods and services to THC are required to be fully vaccinated and show evidence of same**
- o All staff are required to be fully vaccinated; evidence of vaccination is stored securely with human resources staff.**
- o The exception to this with mandatory vaccination and mask wearing for staff and contractors, is if they person has an approved Department of Health valid vaccine exemption and or an approved mask exemption from their treating doctor.**
- o Respect to the mandatory requirements in healthcare for staff and contractors to be vaccinated and wear a mask.**
- o Education resources for staff on infection control practices in various mediums, written procedures, posters, videos, face to face, weekly newsletters**
- o Education resources for patients on infection control practices in various mediums, posters, videos, face to face via the weekly inpatient meeting**
- o SMS reminders to outpatients and day program patients**
- o Sign in / sign out registers for all outpatients, day program patients, visitors, and contractors for contract tracing purposes.**
- o Electronic sign in / sign out which combines COVID-19 screening for staff, again for contact tracing and emergency evacuation.**
- o All staff and patients (inpatients, outpatients, and day program) are required to wear a mask, for staff it is a N95 mask, for patients it is a surgical mask**
- o Staff are also required to wear goggles / safety glasses to increase their protection**
- o Monitoring register of staff and patients who are symptomatic, confirmed close contact or if positive with COVID-19, this is to ensure that all Public Health processes are complied with**
- o A PPE station for staff for donning and doffing has been established in a covered area before and on entry to THC facilities to reduce cross contamination within the facilities.**

2. *Can you confirm that you have sufficient PPE and hand sanitizer to allow staff, and patients, to be kept safe during this pandemic (particularly if there were to be an outbreak at your facility)?*

THC has an infection supply register which is monitored fortnightly, THC have approximately a 6-8 week in house supply of PPE and hand sanitiser for staff. There is also regular review of ordering statuses, including monitoring back ordering delays to ensure THC has sufficient supplies in house. The Department of Health have also informed THC to contact them if they need a supply of PPE or hand sanitiser if THC are having difficulties in obtaining supplies.

3. *Have staff been fit tested for N95 masks? If no, when is this to occur and what are the interim safety measures that will be established while staff are waiting for fit testing?*

Staff have been fit checked for N95, KN95 and P2 respirator masks, to support this process, instructional videos, and posters with instructions, including pictures to also support staff with the fit check process. A variety of respirator masks have also been purchased for staff recognising that all staff have different requirements. All staff have access to a staff member who has done the Fit Check training. Staff are encouraged to ask for assistance if they need to be refitted or have questions about their mask.

4. *What payments or access to special leave will be granted for staff who are required to isolate pending getting access to a COVID test and obtaining the subsequent result? Noting that access to testing is now significantly delayed.*

All staff have access to their own sick leave and personal annual leave, all staff have also been provided information from human resources and the Quality, Risk & Compliance Manager on how to access Pandemic related payments from the government. Any staff member who has exhausted their personal leave can speak with their Manager and Human Resources on what options would be available to support that staff member whilst they are isolating or waiting for test results. THC does not want to see any staff member in financial distress, due to repeated isolations or waiting for test results which has resulted them in exhausting their leave. THC has a flexible approach with respect to this matter and support staff as much as possible, but also recognising that THC is a Charity and financial resources are not limitless.

5. *In the instance that staff are required to receive a third COVID booster dose, will there be access to additional special paid leave/time to attend a booster appointment? If a staff member has an adverse reaction to the booster, will paid leave cover this time as well?*

No staff member is required to have a third COVID-19 booster dose, THC has strongly recommended to staff for their own health, to have a booster. Again, THC has maintained a flexible approach to staff booking in for vaccinations from the beginning. If staff are having difficulty accessing a suitable appointment time outside of work hours, staff only need to speak with their manager if they need to be off-site during their shift. To ensure that THC can maintain business as usual, staff are encouraged to make their booster dose outside of their shift hours or on their days off. All staff can access their sick leave or personal leave if required if they are unwell post vaccination.

6. *Are there any additional leave (over and above personal leave) arrangements available to staff who, not being unwell themselves, need to self-isolate or care for someone (e.g. child) with COVID-19 that will be provided?*

Please refer to the answer provided for question 4 regarding leave arrangements.

7. *Will you be providing Rapid Antigen Testing for staff members? If so, what will the process be for access to these tests?*

At the present time, the Leadership team will not be asking staff to be tested for COVID-19 at the beginning of their shift, nor are we currently providing staff with Rapid Antigen Tests. The Leadership team will continue to review this as a potential option re: testing and availability of tests for staff. THC is also guided by Public Health directives and the Department of Health. If the Leadership team decide to implement mandatory testing and or availability of Rapid Antigen Tests for staff, a consultative approach will be undertaken before any final decisions were made.

8. *Are you willing to commit to presumptive workers compensation if a staff member becomes unwell, after a workplace exposure, with COVID-19?*

Yes, THC is willing to commit to presumptive workers compensation, each claim will be individually assessed by our Insurance company and THC. THC will also follow the requirements from Worksafe Tasmania with respect to reporting.

9. *If a number of staff become unwell (or are not unwell but are required to isolate pending test results) with COVID-19, what plan is in existence to maintain safe staffing levels?*

With respect to maintaining safe staffing levels, THC has a large casual pool of nurses which it can draw upon and is also signed up with a Nursing Agency, this is to provide gaps in our permanent nursing pool. The Leadership team have factored in nurse staffing levels in the THC's pandemic plan. Staffing levels has been factored into THC's pandemic plan. Inpatient bed numbers will be reduced as required to reflect nursing staff numbers and availabilities.

10. *Are you employing additional administration staff to deal with access and entry to your facility and any extra record keeping that is required?*

THC currently has adequate numbers of administration staff who can manage access and entry at our facilities regarding Public Health directives. To support the administration team with these processes, THC is moving towards an electronic system so that our outpatients, day program patients, visitors and contractors can self-check in and register, including COVID-19 screening.

11. *Confirmation of your support for additional 15-minute hydration and comfort break due to workloads and working while in PPE.*

THC currently has two official break periods for nursing staff, 15 minutes, and 30 minutes. THC has always taken a flexible approach with the nursing team with respect to hydration and comfort breaks, the nursing staff have plenty of opportunities to take short breaks, apart from their 'official break periods', throughout their shift as THC also encourages all staff to ensure that they maintain their hydration levels and to take advantage of THC's outdoor areas at the Rokeby facility.

12. *Could you please provide a copy of your staffing strategy and any staffing contingency plans*

With respect to your request for a copy of the 'staffing strategy and any staffing contingency plans', THC is a very small organisation and has not developed a standalone document with respect to this request. Triggers and prompts of when to review staffing levels and strategies are in THC's Pandemic Management Plan. THC leadership team is in regular contact, often daily via video conference to discuss matters relating to the Pandemic and the current outbreak of the Omicron variant, regarding staffing and resourcing.

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.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary
28 January 2022