

ANMF COVID-19 Newsflash: TasIVF/Hobart Specialist Day Hospital (HSDH)

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) wrote to TasIVF/HSDH management to seek an update on information in relation to their response to the current Omicron COVID-19 situation. 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.*

Our approach has been to move our patients to telehealth consults for doctors and phone consults for nurses where possible, which has enabled us to reduce the number of patients attending our clinic, with face-to-face patient contact kept to a minimum (e.g. for medication teaches, ultrasound scans and procedures). Further the clinic has implemented a strict 'no accompanying visitor policy' that remains in effect.

We have also implemented a process in which nursing staff spread out into various separate offices, including working from home when available. All nursing staff are required to wear appropriate PPE whilst onsite. This includes N95 masks at all times and additional PPE (face shield, gown, gloves) during patient contact.

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)?*
Yes.

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?*

No. We are not required in Tasmania to have N95 masks fit tested, however, we do provide staff with information and support to adequately don their N95 masks.

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.*
In the first instance, where possible, we will seek for our staff to work from home if they are required to isolate. However, if providing a work from home option isn't possible, the company will enable staff to access annual leave or accrued Long Service Leave.
Also, the company has Rapid Antigen Tests and an in-house PCR machine (to be commissioned in the next few weeks) available and therefore we are able to reduce delays for testing results should there be a need for staff to access tests (to be assessed on a case-by-case basis)
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?*
It is not mandated by the Tasmania Department of Health; however, the company strongly encourages its staff to receive a third COVID booster dose. Staff needing to attend appointments for their third dose are permitted to take reasonable paid time away from work during work hours. If staff are sick as a result of receiving the vaccine, they can access reasonable accrued sick leave. Currently, all nursing staff working for TasIVF have received their third COVID booster dose.
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?*
Under certain circumstances, working from home options may be available for those staff who are well but need to isolate. Otherwise, staff may temporarily access carer's leave.
7. *Will you be providing Rapid Antigen Testing for staff members? If so, what will the process be for access to these tests?*
While the RAT supply is limited, TasIVF has ensured procurement of sufficient stock to support patient requirements. While not intended for staff, in certain circumstances, a RAT kit may be made available to staff if they are unable to be obtained a RAT test from Public Health or at the pharmacy. The circumstances would be considered on an individual basis and must be approved by the TasIVF Operations Manager.
8. *Are you willing to commit to presumptive workers compensation if a staff member becomes unwell, after a workplace exposure, with COVID-19?*
COVID-19 is highly infectious and spreads very easily. It would be virtually impossible to identify exactly from whom someone has contracted the illness. Due to the health and safety precautions practiced at TasIVF, such as our implementation of PPE and

distancing of staff on site, as indicated above. The company has taken all reasonable action to protect the health and safety of our staff.

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?*

If staff are isolating, but have not tested positive for COVID-19, and if there is a critical need for them to return to work due to a risk of unsafe staffing levels, the company may apply the “Critical Workers” provision as defined by the Tasmania Government. At TasIVF our Day Hospital theatre nurses would fall into this category.

Where possible, for staff who are asymptomatic, we would offer them the work from home option.

Alternately, if the above options will not ensure suitable staffing levels, the Company may be required to temporarily reduce the intake of patients or access available interstate/locum staff.

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

No. The reduction in patients/visitors attending clinic due to our increased telehealth and phone consultations has resulted in us not requiring an increase in administrative staff.

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

Staff are encouraged to take a drink break whenever they require.

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

We do not have a written plan that we could share.

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.