

## Ministry of Health Workforce Advice 20 March 2020

### COVID-19

#### General

Precautionary measures are in place in response to the evolving novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. This document provides guidance for Health Agencies relating to staff who have:

- travelled to COVID-19 affected countries;
- had close contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19 infection;
- had casual contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19 infection;
- have primary carer responsibilities for children directed to stay home from school/ daycare; and/ or
- who remain overseas and are unable to return

#### Further information on COVID-19:

- NSW Health:  
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>  
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus-update.aspx>
- Clinical Excellence Commission:  
<http://cec.health.nsw.gov.au/keep-patients-safe/infection-prevention-and-control/Coronavirus-COVID-19>

### Staff Returning from Overseas Travel in the Past 14 days

The below provides guidance for staff in NSW Health facilities who are **returning from overseas**:

From 16 March 2020, all overseas travellers, including all healthcare workers, staff, healthcare students and volunteers, must:

- contact their supervisor directly for advice prior to returning to work;
- **self-isolate at home other than for seeking individual medical care for 14 days from the day of return from overseas**
- if fever or respiratory illness (even if mild) occur, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Call the healthdirect helpline 1800 022 222 for advice or call ahead before seeing your GP or go directly to the local Emergency Department or COVID-19 clinic

**Note:** For staff who returned to Australia from overseas **between 2 March 2020 and midnight 15 March 2020**; the default is now that those staff should also **not attend work** until 14 days have elapsed since their return from overseas. This includes circumstances where the staff member has returned to work and is well. They will now need to **not attend work** until 14 days have elapsed from returning to Australia.

In settings where the absence of the healthcare worker will have a significant impact on health services a case by case risk assessment should be undertaken with input from the Public Health Unit. Work from home arrangements may be arranged where appropriate.

For guidance on self-isolation please visit: [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-isolation-guidance\\_2.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-isolation-guidance_2.pdf)

### **Employees\* Who Are Excluded from the Workplace for Self- Isolation**

Special Paid Leave may be granted to employees to enable self-isolation where required following return from overseas travel or following [Close Contact](#) with a confirmed COVID-19 case (see page 5).

#### **Health Agencies should consider whether it is possible for those employees to work from home**

- if employees cannot undertake their substantive duties from home, Health Agencies should consider assigning other meaningful work which could be performed at home. For example telehealth, project work, completion of mandatory training etc.

#### **Special Paid Leave should be granted for employees by a Health Agency where working from home is not practicable**

- if employees cannot perform any work from home they should be directed not to attend work and be placed on paid special leave for any rostered time during the 14 day isolation period (or balance thereof).

#### **Employees with existing approved leave (annual, long service, leave without pay) who travel privately overseas should be made aware of the following:**

**For travel from 16 March 2020;** if an employee chooses to still travel overseas; regardless of the COVID-19 status of the destination, they will **not** be granted paid special leave to cover isolation upon return to Australia.

**For travel prior to 16 March 2020;** entitlement to paid special leave will be dependent on the Smartraveller advice level on the date of their departure (refer to previous workforce advice for the relevant period).

#### **Special Paid Leave for Casuals**

Casual employees are generally not entitled to paid special leave. If a casual is required to self-isolate due to close contact COVID-19 exposure in the workplace, each situation should be considered by the Health Agency on a case by case basis including such things as the length of the casual engagement and whether the casual has regular and systematic shifts; however special paid leave may be appropriate for shifts which are already rostered during the self-isolation period.

**\*Employee: means a person who is either engaged on a full time/ part time/ temporary/ exempt or casual basis under a contract of employment in the NSW Health Service**

## Special Paid Leave Provisions for Employees

In respect of COVID-19, special paid leave of up to 20 days **in total** may be granted to employees who are unable to work because they are:

- Self-isolating due to travel or close contact COVID-19 exposure\*
- Caring for family members sick with COVID-19;
- Caring for family members due to closure of school/daycare; and/ or
- Unable to attend work due to transport disruptions or workplace closure.

\*See Page 3 - 'Employees who are excluded from the workplace for self-isolation'.

Special paid leave will be provided before other leave entitlements are accessed.

After the 20 days total special paid leave has been used, employees may access accrued leave entitlements (in accordance with normal processes).

The 20 days special leave will be provided on a pro-rata basis for part time staff.

### **Employees who remain overseas and are unable to return**

Available FACS leave can be used for employees unable to return home due to COVID-19. Districts should be flexible with other leave requests (e.g. ADO, Annual and Long Service Leave and Leave without pay if FACS leave has been exhausted). Special paid leave is not granted for this purpose.

For official travel related matters contact Ministry of Health Workplace Relations for situationally specific advice.

## Staff who have Contact with a Confirmed Case of COVID-19

(1)

If **Close Contact** of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 has occurred:

Until 14 days have lapsed from last contact:

- must not attend work
- self-isolate at home other than for seeking individual medical care for 14 days from the last day of contact
- monitor symptoms for 14 days since last contact
- if fever or respiratory illness (even if mild) occur, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Call the healthdirect helpline 1800 022 222 for advice or call ahead before seeing your GP. If the decision is to go to your local Emergency Department or COVID-19 clinic please call ahead.

(2)

If **Casual Contact** of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 has occurred:

- can continue to attend work if well
- must self-isolate and seek assessment if they develop fever or respiratory illness

**Note:** Close Contact does not include situations where staff had contact with a known confirmed COVID-19 case during work activity; where such contact was protected by the wearing of prescribed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the duration of the contact.

## Leave Management and Workforce Supply Planning

Workforce units need to engage with employees about managing leave differently during COVID-19 and seek their support. This is important to ensure workforce supply to manage demand. A dedicated contact should be established within the Health Agency for the purposes of planning workforce supply.

Management of excessive leave is not the priority during the COVID-19 situation and additional flexibility is required where staffing resources are limited. Rostering of ADOs for eligible staff should continue throughout the current COVID-19 situation.

New requests for approval of secondary employment must be considered against the needs of the workforce surge plan particularly for employees in clinical or frontline support roles.

A key piece of work will be to identify employees with clinical skillsets and current registration who are not working in clinical 'patient facing' roles in anticipation that such information should be included for planning purposes in the Workforce Surge Plan.

### Event Planning

Agencies should review any planned events which involve meetings of large numbers of staff to minimise the absence of staff who are needed to assist with surge planning and service delivery.

Consideration should be given to postponing these events or managing them in a different way (e.g. webinars, circulation of papers, etc) and:

- 1. Outdoor Gatherings** of more than 500 people are not to proceed in accordance with the Federal Government directive 18 March 2020.
- 2. Indoor Gatherings** of more than 100 people are not to proceed in accordance with the Federal Government directive on 18 March 2020.  
**NOTE:** *An indoor gathering takes place within a single enclosed area (i.e. a single room or area).  
Essential activities such as health care settings, pharmacies, food shopping, schools, workplaces and public transport are not included in this restriction. However, social distancing and good hygiene practices should be applied in these settings where possible.*
- 3. Non-essential meetings or conferences of critical workforce** e.g. healthcare professionals and emergency services should be limited

More information about gatherings is available [here](#)

In addition, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee on 13 March 2020, recommended that healthcare professionals and other critical workforce should limit their attendance at non-essential meetings and conferences. This advice is in addition to the broader advice to limit all non-essential organised gatherings to fewer than 500 people.

### **New Leave Requests and Approvals**

As the COVID-19 situation progresses; Health Agencies should now suspend business as usual processes for leave approval (annual, long service, leave without pay) and establish in their surge plans how such new leave requests will be approved over the next six months.

#### **Key points for consideration include:**

- exceptional personal circumstances (e.g. bereavement, family, weddings)
- projected workforce supply for COVID-19
- high demand periods such as school holidays
- winter flu (surge in demand and possibility of increase numbers of employees absent due to personal illness/ family illness)
- strategies for employees to work outside their usual allocation to support high demand areas
- supporting settings where there are existing vacancies

### **Existing Approved Leave**

Where leave (annual, long service, leave without pay) has already been approved in most instances this should proceed unless there is significant reason to withdraw approval. Health Agencies should anticipate that in some cases, employees may seek to cancel their existing approved leave due to COVID-19.

## Leave Due to Illness

### **Encourage Staff not to Attend Work When Unwell**

Staff who are unwell for any reason should not come to work in line with current established practice.

Please refer to <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus-healthcare-staff.aspx> for the latest advice in relation to staff illness, assessment and testing.

### **Employees who are unable to work because they are sick:**

If an employee is sick due to COVID-19 or any other reason, current sick leave entitlements and conditions apply. This includes situations where an employee is self-isolating on special leave and becomes sick for any reason; at that point the employee should transition onto sick leave. Where sick leave is exhausted, Health Agencies may grant additional sick leave on a case by case basis.

### **Granting of Paid Sick Leave to Employees who have been employed for Less Than 3 Months**

Award provisions for newly employed Full Time and Part Time NSW Health employees in some cases defer entitlement to paid Sick Leave for a period of 3 months from commencement.

Where a new employee's entitlement to paid Sick Leave is deferred; Health Agencies are encouraged to allow access to paid Sick Leave from commencement for eligible employees.



## Official Work Related Travel Arrangements for All Overseas and Domestic Travel (Including TESL)

### Domestic Travel

Health Agencies should review all currently booked domestic travel. Domestic travel should be restricted to essential travel only.

### All Official Overseas Travel (Including TESL)

All official overseas travel should be cancelled in accordance with current Smartraveller advice with effect from 18 March 2020 for all overseas travel destinations:

<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/crisis/covid-19-and-travel>