

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
Minister for Equality



Monday, 10 January 2022

KEEPING VICTORIAN WORKERS IN KEY SECTORS SAFE

Given the current rate of COVID-19 hospitalisations and cases, a number of important but proportionate changes will be introduced to further protect our highest-risk health care and hospitality settings – and key workforces – from the risk of outbreaks and super-spreader events.

Under new pandemic orders coming into place at 11:59pm Wednesday 12 January, workers in key sectors who are already required to be fully vaccinated must get their third dose before being permitted to work onsite.

This will apply to healthcare, aged care, disability, emergency services, correctional facility, quarantine accommodation and food distribution workers. Workplaces must sight and record proof of vaccination.

Workers eligible for a third dose on or before Wednesday 12 January will have until Saturday 12 February to get their vital third dose. Workers not yet eligible for a third dose will be required to get it within three months and two weeks of the deadline to receive their second mandatory dose.

This means residential aged care workers must receive their third dose by 1 March, and health care workers by 29 March. Disability, quarantine accommodation, correctional facilities, emergency services, and food distribution workers will need to receive their third dose by 12 March.

Food distribution workers includes manufacturing, warehousing and transport (freight/port) workers involved in food distribution. Retail supermarket staff are not included in the mandate.

Victorians in these priority cohorts were among the first required to have their first and second dose vaccination during 2021. The mandatory vaccination requirement will not apply to workers who have a valid medical exemption.

This order responds to the increased risks of COVID-19 exposure to critical workers, their proximity to vulnerable people, the higher risk of the virus spreading in their workplace and the need to protect access to essential goods and services.

All Victorians continue to be encouraged to get their third dose as soon as they become eligible and we'll continue working with public health experts and industry on vaccination requirements.

As a sensible step to reduce the risks of the virus spreading, indoor dancefloors within hospitality and entertainment venues must close from 11:59pm 12 January. Venues can still operate and there are no changes to the density settings currently in place.

This change reflects settings already in place in other states, including New South Wales. Indoor dancefloors at weddings will be permitted, but wedding hosts and guests should still consider the risks of dancefloors and choose to locate them outdoors if possible.

The strong recommendations that people work from home if they are able and that patrons in hospitality and entertainment venues opt for seated service will continue. It is recommended that people visiting these venues who can access Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) should use them before attending.

Please continue to monitor your health and get tested if you are experiencing symptoms.

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In addition, further visitor restrictions will be applied to hospitals and aged care settings – reflecting the vulnerable nature of patients and residents in these facilities.

Residents at aged care centres will continue to be permitted up to five visitors per day, but visitors must return a negative RAT result before entering. If no RATs are available at the facility, residents will be permitted no more than two visitors.

Visitors in hospitals must have received two doses of the vaccine or must return a negative RAT result before entering. Adult visitors who are not fully vaccinated must wear an N95 mask during their visit. Standard face masks continue to be mandated for children aged 8 and above.

While test requirements upon arrival remain unchanged, fully vaccinated international arrivals will no longer need to get a second PCR or RAT five to seven days after their arrival. This change is in line with the decision of National Cabinet last week and recognises the high levels of COVID-19 transmission currently in the community.

To ensure Victorians can continue to access essential food supplies, workers in the manufacturing, distribution or packaging of food and beverages including retail supermarket workers may be exempted from close contact isolation requirements in order to attend work from 11.59pm Wednesday 12 January, if it is necessary for continuity of operations and other options have been exhausted.

To mitigate risks, exempted workers must be asymptomatic, undertake daily RATs for 5 days and return a negative result prior to attending work. They can't enter shared break areas, and employers are asked to facilitate solo break time.

In addition, face coverings must be worn, using N95/P2 respirators if possible. Both the worker and workplace must consent to the worker's return.

This new close contact isolation exemption for asymptomatic food distribution workers is similar to the arrangements already in place for critical healthcare workers.

Information on updated COVIDSafe settings and third dose vaccination requirements will be published at www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au when the orders come into effect at 11:59pm Wednesday 12 January.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"This is a sensible extension of our existing vaccination requirements – ensuring our critical workers and the vulnerable community members they look after are protected."

"Victoria is open and the community is encouraged to support businesses in a COVIDSafe way. Closing indoor dancefloors is a simple but important step – we know they pose an extraordinary risk of mass transmission."

"No setting is more vulnerable than hospitals and aged care, and that's why visitors to hospitals will be required to have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine or return a negative Rapid Antigen Test."

The pandemic orders were made under [s165A](#) of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 after consideration of advice from the Acting Chief Health Officer and Acting Chief Health Officer. The pandemic orders were issued under powers granted by the making of a pandemic declaration under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act on 10 December. The initial orders were in effect for four weeks, and subsequent orders may now be in force for up to three months. The order, the CHO advice, the Minister's Statement of Reasons and the Human Rights Statement will be published on the Department's website within seven days of the orders coming into effect.