

# Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP  
Premier



Thursday, 13 January 2022

## A SAFE AND SENSIBLE RETURN TO WORK FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

With the number of COVID-19 close contacts continuing to grow, Victoria's public health team will provide more essential workers with an exemption from close contact home isolation requirements to attend their workplace.

From 11:59pm, Tuesday 18 January, workers in emergency services, education, critical utilities, custodial facilities, transport and freight will join workers in the food production sector as being eligible for the exemption.

Under the conditions of the exemption, the worker may return to work if it is necessary for continuity of operations and if other options have been exhausted. The exemption will apply to attending work only, not any other settings.

In order to be eligible, the worker must first notify the employer of their status as a contact, and critically, both parties must consent to the worker returning to the workplace. They are already required to be fully vaccinated.

Strong measures will be required to reduce the risk of a contact attending work while infectious:

- The worker must undertake a daily Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) for five days and return a negative result prior to attending work each day
- They must wear a face mask at all times, with exceptions in the case of eating or drinking, or safety reasons, and a P2/N95 respirator is preferred
- The worker cannot enter shared break areas and the employer must try and facilitate solo break time. The employer must also take reasonable steps to deploy the worker in areas where transmission risk is lower
- If at any time the worker develops symptoms or tests positive on a RAT, the exemption no longer applies – they are a case, must isolate for 7 days, and must notify others including their employer

The exemption order is identical to that granted by Victoria's public health team for key food and beverage workers, and is designed to protect the state's essential workforce during the continuing Omicron wave.

This exemption also currently applies to hospital workers, disability workers, residential aged care facility workers, and ambulance workers, but the use of an N95 mask at the workplace is a requirement, not a preference.

Close contacts, otherwise known as household and household-like contacts, are people who have spent more than four hours with a case inside a house, accommodation or care facility.

The Department of Health has also updated its contact management guidelines to require workplaces to notify the Department when five cases have attended the work premises within seven days. Previously, workplaces were required to advise the Department and Worksafe of single cases.

More information on the conditions of the exemption and applicable cohorts of workers will be published at [www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/isolation-exemptions](http://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/isolation-exemptions) when they come into effect at 11:59pm, Tuesday 18 January.

### Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

*"This is about helping Victorians keep food on the table, lights on in the house and staff on in our hospitals."*

*"It's safe and sensible in the eyes of our public health team, but to further protect themselves and the community, workers will have to use a rapid antigen test every day and wear a mask at all times."*

For information about coronavirus visit [coronavirus.vic.gov.au](http://coronavirus.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 675 398.

*“The worker’s rights are protected, and they can’t be directed to work if they are a contact – the worker has to agree to come in, just as they have to agree to the various preventative measures that will reduce risks for others.”*

#### **LIST OF APPLICABLE WORKERS**

- Emergency Service such as police, fire services and the SES
- Prisons and custodial services
- Critical utilities such as gas, electricity, water and waste disposal
- Freight and transport operators, including at ports and airports
- Primary, secondary and early childhood education
- Critical care services that support our most vulnerable.