

# COVID-19 Workforce Advice for NSW Health



**Workplace Relations Branch**

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## 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, States and/ or Territories;
- 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 Government  
<https://preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>
- NSW Health  
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>
- Clinical Excellence Commission  
<http://cec.health.nsw.gov.au>
- Safe Work Australia  
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-employers>
- SafeWork NSW  
<https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/hazards-a-z/diseases/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-guidance-for-nsw-workplaces>

## Paid special leave provisions for employees

In respect of COVID-19, paid special 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
- Unable to attend work due to transport disruptions or workplace closure
- A vulnerable health worker who following completion of a risk assessment is unable to be redeployed to a lower COVID-19 risk environment and is unable to work from home or self-isolation.

\*See [Employees who are excluded from the workplace for self-isolation](#).

Special leave is to be paid at the base rate (excluding allowances and penalty rates) and will be provided in advance of the need to access other leave entitlements, if available.

After the 20 days total paid special 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.

### Paid special 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:

- length of the casual engagement and
- Whether the casual has regular and systemic shifts

Paid special leave may be appropriate for shifts which are already rostered during the self-isolation period.

**Note: 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.**

### Paid pandemic leave for Visiting Medical Officers (VMO)s

Where a VMO is directed into isolation due to known exposure to COVID-19 at a NSW Health facility or is sick with COVID-19 and in the absence of income protection insurance they are to receive pandemic leave at an hourly rate of \$155 per hour for the portion of time they would have otherwise been engaged to provide services up to 8 hours per day.

This is applicable from 31 March 2020 until rescinded.

## **Employees who are excluded from the workplace for self-isolation**

Paid special leave may be granted to employees to enable self-isolation where required following:

- Return from overseas travel
- Following [close contact](#) with a confirmed COVID-19 case
- After visiting a NSW COVID-19 Case Location where the advice for the location on the date/ time visited is: 'Self-isolate and get tested immediately'
- Where a Health Care Worker has been directed via Public Health advice not to attend work because someone in their household is a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case and they are unable to return to work until the household member's first COVID-19 test relating to the close contact comes back negative.

*(See Entry Screening of Staff at NSW Health Facilities- p. (9) for more information)*

### **Health agencies should consider whether it is possible for those employees to work from their self- isolation location**

If employees cannot undertake their substantive duties from their self-isolation location, health agencies should consider assigning other meaningful work which could be performed from self-isolation. For example: telehealth, project work, completion of mandatory training etc.

### **Paid special leave should be granted for employees by a Health agency where working from self-isolation is not practical**

If employees cannot perform any work from self-isolation, 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 or to an Australian State/ Territory with border restrictions should be made aware of the following:**

If an employee chooses to travel overseas or to an Australian State/ Territory with border restrictions; regardless of the COVID-19 status of the destination, they will not be granted paid special leave to cover isolation upon return to Australia/ New South Wales.

## Staff who have contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

If a close contact of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 has occurred  
Until 14 days have lapsed from last contact, the staff member must:

- Not attend work
- Self-isolate other than for seeking individual medical care for 14 days from the last day of contact
- Monitor symptoms for 14 days since last contact
- Seek medical attention as soon as possible if fever or respiratory illness (even if mild) occur. 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.

If a casual contact of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 has occurred The staff member must:

- Continue to attend work if well
- 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.

## Staff Affected by NSW COVID-19 Case Locations

**Current NSW COVID-19 Case Locations change often and are subject to daily updates**

NSW Health agencies should regularly check the current list to ensure staff who have travelled to these locations are identified at entry screening:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/latest-news-and-updates>

Where a staff member has **visited a location** on a relevant date **and the advice for the location is that self-isolation is required**; the staff member must **not attend work** and will be required to **self-isolate** in accordance with the public health advice for the location.

Where a staff member has **visited a location** on a relevant date **and the advice for the location is that monitoring for symptoms required**; the staff member may **attend work** and will be required to **self-isolate and get tested should they develop symptoms**.

If the staff member is asymptomatic and it is practicable for them to **work from home** during self-isolation, then they may do so with approval of their employing health agency. Where this is not practicable eligible staff should **proceed onto special leave**.

**It is recommended that at a minimum; NSW Health agencies check the list of locations above:**

- At commencement and conclusion of each business day; and
- Before commencement of each shift (i.e. morning, afternoon and night shifts; along with any other regular shift patterns)

## Staff returning from overseas travel

Follow smart traveller directions in relation to self-isolation requirements upon return to Australia: <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/while-youre-away/returning-australia>

## 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.

Flexibility is required where staffing resources are limited. Rostering of ADOs for eligible staff and wherever possible annual leave should continue throughout the current COVID-19 situation.

### Secondary Employment

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.

### New leave requests and approvals

Health agencies need to manage staff leave in accordance with the changing COVID-19 situation. This will mean that workforce plans will need to be adjusted to balance a consistent supply of staff to meet demand with facilitating leave applications from staff and for the purposes of managing leave balances (annual, long service, leave without pay)

It is important that staff continue to have access to leave in order to rest and recover. This should be facilitated wherever possible. There may still be a need to not approve a particular application for an individual staff member in a critical role; however, if this is the case the following factors should be considered:

### 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
- Seasonal surges in demand and possibility of increased 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 this should proceed unless there is significant reason to withdraw approval.

## 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 [Advice for healthcare workers, staff, students and volunteers](#) 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.
- Symptomatic (including a temperature with/ without other symptoms) and requires testing for COVID-19. Sick leave is applicable for the period from where the staff member becomes symptomatic; through to testing and until a negative COVID-19 test result is received by the staff member, regardless of whether the staff member becomes asymptomatic during the period.

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 three 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 three 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.

## Entry Screening of Staff at NSW Health Facilities

**All staff and visitors entering a NSW Health hospital or health service must be screened.**

COVID-19 health screening involves a symptom check, a temperature check and an exposure assessment.

**Please visit the NSW Health COVID-19 screening at NSW healthcare facilities site for information on entry screening requirements as regularly updated:**

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/screening-procedure-nsw-health-facilities.aspx>

**NOTE: There are extensive and specific requirements for staff and visitor entry to Residential Aged Care Facilities; please see below:**

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/residential-aged-care.aspx>

## Interstate Staff Travel for Recreational Purposes

Australian State and Territory borders are subject to rapid closures and changes to quarantine or self-isolation requirements without notice as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are therefore asked to carefully consider interstate travel plans. Special Leave is not available for time spent quarantining or self-isolating as a consequence of recreational travel.

Interstate travel on compassionate grounds (due to death/ illness of relatives residing interstate) will be considered on a case by case basis by the employing Health Agency; in the event quarantine or self isolation is required upon return to New South Wales.

### Public Health Order (COVID-19 Border Control) Order 2020

NSW Health site with information on the PHOs:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/public-health-orders.aspx>

Direct link to the PHOs:

<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/information/covid19-legislation>

## Event Planning

Agencies should not plan events which involve meetings of large numbers of staff to minimise the absence of staff and ensure the availability of staff for all phases of the Covid-19 situation especially the possibility of groups of staff being required to self-isolate at short notice. Consideration should be given to postponing these events or managing them in a different way (e.g. webinars, circulation of papers, etc) and:

1. **Non-essential meetings or conferences** of workforce especially critical workforce such as healthcare professionals and emergency services should be limited. Proactive measures for compliance with physical distancing advice to keep a safe distance (1.5 metres) between staff should be maintained in all circumstances where possible to do so.
2. **Corporate events** are events, hospitality or social activity organised, held or funded by a business or other organisation for staff, clients or stakeholders and held at a function centre.

Requirements for corporate events recently changed; information about the requirements for events is available here:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe/conferences-functions-corporate-events>

## Official work-related travel arrangements for all overseas and domestic travel (including TESL)

### Domestic travel

Domestic travel should be restricted to essential travel only.

### All official overseas travel (including TESL)

No official overseas travel should occur in accordance with current [Smartraveller advice](#) with effect from 18 March 2020 for all overseas travel destinations.

## Temporary paid accommodation arrangements for health workers providing frontline health services

Provisions for temporary paid accommodation for health workers providing frontline health services (including hospital and ambulance staff) were announced on 6 April 2020.

Further detail around these provisions is available [here](#)

## Historic Information- Special Leave

In relation to an employee's entitlement to special leave; the Department of Premier and Cabinet introduced 20 days special leave on 13 March 2020 for COVID-19 purposes. Prior to that date NSW Health has its own special leave of up to 14 days. This ceased on the announcement of the 20 day leave entitlement. Any Special Leave paid prior to 13 March 2020 will not be deducted from the 20-day entitlement.

### 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). Paid special leave is not granted for this purpose.

For official travel-related matters, contact [Ministry of Health](#) for situationally-specific advice.

### 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).