

Frequently Asked Questions

COVID-19 Staff Guidance

V:11 – 24/11/22

What is a close contact?

- A COVID-19 close contact is someone who lives with a positive case (household contact) or has spent more than four hours with a positive person in a house, accommodation or care facility setting during their infectious period (household-like contact)

I'm a close contact, what now?

- Staff who are a close contact of a positive case must declare their close contact status by completing the [Eastern Health Positive test and Close or Workplace Contact Notification Form](#)
- Staff may continue to work during the 7-day period following the diagnosis of their contact. An exemption to attend work is no longer required.
- There are a number of requirements for staff who are working on-site during the 7-day period following the diagnosis of their contact, including that they:
 - Remain asymptomatic
 - Complete a RAT prior to leaving their home & commencing each shift until day 5, and on day 6 regardless of roster
 - Wear a fit-tested N95 mask and eye protection at all times for seven days whilst on-site (unless eating and drinking)
 - Do not enter shared break rooms and take breaks separately (and preferably outside) for seven days
 - Make efforts to isolate away from the positive person in their household where possible

What if I'm aware of a different exposure that doesn't meet close contact definition (now termed 'risk-individuals')?

The following situations qualify a staff member as 'risk-individuals' but not close contacts:

Workplace exposures:

- Please note that staff are not considered exposed at work (regardless of the duration of contact with a case) if they were wearing an N95 mask and eye protection
- For staff notified by IPAC, their manager or a colleague of a contact with a COVID-positive person in the workplace, please complete the [REDCap Positive Case and Close or Workplace Contact Notification form](#) and follow advice provided by your manager and IPAC.

Social exposures and return to work after international travel:

- Many staff will become aware they have been exposed to COVID cases outside of the workplace in settings that do not meet the close contact criteria above: 15 minutes face-to-face or 2 hours or more in a shared room qualifies as a social exposure.
- Return from international travel in the past 7 days (please note the Department of Health requests international travellers to undertake a RAT within 24 hours of arrival)

Actions: 'risk-individuals'

- Staff are asked to undertake a RAT prior to each shift for 5 days after their exposure/return from travel.

- We additionally request that staff wear an N95 mask at all times when at work and take meal breaks alone (and preferably outside) for 7 days after the date of any exposure/travel.

When must staff contact/inform IPAC?

IPAC must be informed via the Eastern Health Positive test and Close or Workplace Contact Notification Form when :

- Staff have a **positive RAT or COVID PCR** test. Staff must not attend work.
- Staff are a **close contact** (as per the above definition) of a person with a positive RAT test or PCR test.

COVID Testing for Staff:

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs):

- Rapid antigen tests are now the preferred tests for COVID
- RAT kits for staff can be collected from Eastern Health sites or testing centres
- Instructions differ for different test kits. Staff are asked to follow the instructions applicable to the test kit used.
- A PCR test is a more accurate test to detect and diagnose COVID-19, however, a positive RAT is now accepted by the Department of Health as evidence of COVID-19 infection without requiring confirmation by PCR.

PCR tests:

- Eastern Health no longer runs a COVID-19 screening clinic.
- Asymptomatic PCR screening tests for staff are no longer available (RATs may be used if desired).
- Staff can access PCRs at public clinics. Please Note Eastern health has no control over test processing or results: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/get-pcr-test-covid-19>

RAT results:

Follow the instructions on the test kit carefully. If you don't, your results may not be correct. The table below outlines what you should do depending on your test result.

Result	Action required
Positive	You are considered a positive case of COVID-19. You do not need a confirmatory PCR.* Please isolate and notify both the Department of Health and Eastern Health of this result (instructions below).
Negative	If you feel well, continue as normal and monitor for symptoms. If you become unwell, repeat your RAT or visit a COVID-19 testing site for a PCR test.
Inconclusive	Repeat with another RAT. If still inconclusive, visit a COVID-19 testing site for a PCR test.

*If you have **no symptoms AND no known exposure**, the Department of Health suggests confirming this result with a PCR test within 48 hours of the positive RAT. If you have a PCR test, you should continue to isolate as a positive case until you receive your result – if you remain well, and the PCR is negative, you may leave isolation. If you cannot access a PCR, assume the positive RAT is correct and complete 7 days' isolation. In all other cases, if you have a positive RAT, you should not undertake further tests. You are positive.

I have tested positive on a RAT or a PCR, what do I do?

- People with COVID must not attend a sensitive setting (this includes Healthcare facilities and Residential Aged Care facilities) for 7 days after testing positive.
- Complete [the Eastern Health Positive test and Close or Workplace Contact Notification Form](#) to notify IPAC. Staff should complete this action as soon as possible.
- Staff are also required to report a positive RAT to the Department of Health online at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/report> or by calling 1800 675 398.
- After completing the Eastern Health notification form, staff who have worked during their infectious period will receive information by email about what to do: this information will outline steps staff and managers should take to identify any workplace exposures and contacts, who may need to follow instructions for workplace contacts/risk-individuals.
- Special COVID leave applies for the first 7 days after a staff member tests positive. If staff remain symptomatic after 7 days, they are required to use personal/sick leave until they are recovered and can return (as below).

I have tested negative on a Rapid Antigen Test, what do I need to do?

- Staff are **not** required to report negative RATs
- If staff have symptoms, staff should wait until symptoms have resolved before returning to work. Should symptoms persist, staff should repeat their RAT +/- undergo a PCR.

I tested positive and have completed my 7 days away from sensitive settings. what do I need to do to return to work?

- Staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 may return to work after day 7 from the date of collection of their positive test if they have either been asymptomatic or any symptoms have resolved.
 - Day 1 is considered the day the test is positive. If that is (for example) Monday, day 7 is the next Sunday, and staff may return to work (see below) on the following Monday at the earliest.
- Staff who have persisting symptoms should wait until recovery before returning to work. There is NO need for clearance testing for positive staff.
- For one week after return to work, staff recovering from COVID must wear an N95 mask at all times on-site, and take meal breaks alone.
- Staff are considered 'immune' for 4 weeks after they recover from COVID. During this period, they should not undertake asymptomatic testing, and are not considered contacts after any new exposure.
- Staff with significant medical conditions resulting in immune compromise, or taking medicines that result in immune compromise, should contact IPAC to discuss any further required actions. CPG 3440 provides additional instructions on immune suppression.

My COVID-19 symptoms are manageable. How can I treat my symptoms at home?

- [Resources](#) are available for those who are able to treat symptoms from home

What are some general measures/behaviours staff should be adhering to in the workplace?

- Wear a mask (see table below & CPG 244 for current mask settings)
- Ensure regular hand hygiene

- Ensure COVID vaccination is up to date (including booster doses)
- If unwell (COVID symptoms), do a RAT or PCR test and stay home until recovered

What can I do about breaks at work?

- Staff should be mindful that shared meal break rooms (tea rooms etc.) can present a risk for COVID exposure.
- To minimise potential exposure, staff may wish to take breaks alone and outside if facilities and weather permits

What are the current mask & eyewear settings?

Staff requirements	General areas of all EH premises	Clinical areas (including inpatient, day-care & ambulatory settings)	All SCOVID care	COVID areas*
Eyewear	Optional [^]	Optional / recommended for Emergency Departments	Tier 3 PPE, face shield preferable	
Masks	General public accessible areas: Surgical mask Non-public accessible areas (where patients will not be present): Surgical mask	N95 and completed and passed Fit Test		

Vaccination Requirements:

- Healthcare workers are required to have completed a primary course of vaccine and a booster dose (unless a valid exemption is held). Staff not meeting this requirement are not permitted on Eastern Health campuses.
- Eastern Health is required to have documented evidence for all staff that this vaccination requirement is met.
- After 25 June 2022, Eastern Health may access the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) record to ascertain individual staff vaccination status. Staff may request this does not occur by contacting their manager & IPAC.

Future COVID-19 Vaccination Booster doses – when will they be available?

- All healthcare workers are now required to have completed a primary vaccination course and a booster dose. Please note: some health conditions required a 3-dose primary course of COVID vaccine, so a first booster would be the 4th vaccine dose.
- A second booster dose is recommended for all Victorians over the age of 50, and suggested for those between 30 and 49. This booster can be received as soon as 12 weeks have elapsed from the most recent vaccination dose or COVID-19 infection, where applicable.
- New vaccines are now available that have added activity against Omicron variants of COVID. These can be accessed at community vaccine providers.

What if I have received my COVID-19 Vaccination Booster at a non-Eastern Health site?

- If staff receive a booster outside of Eastern Health (i.e. from your GP or local Pharmacy), they are asked to please provide evidence [here](#).

Fit testing:

- Anyone working in a clinical setting or non-clinical staff that come into contact with patients in their work should be fit tested.
- Book in via [iLearn](#) and wear an available N95 that passes [fit-check](#) in the meantime. Staff without a current fit-test are not allowed to enter SCOVID or COVID zones/rooms.
- Re-test is required every 12 months or if there has been substantial change to your face shape e.g. following facial surgery or significant change in weight.

I'm feeling anxiety surrounding the pandemic, where can I get help?

- There is a range of free and confidential wellbeing services available. Visit the Wellbeing Page on the [Intranet](#) or [Workplace](#) for details.

Where can I find out more information about COVID-19?

- For the latest news and vaccine information visit the [Department of Health Website](#).

Information accurate as at 24/11/2022.