



# Covid-19 Policy

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## About Covid-19

Covid-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus (COVID-19) first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illnesses from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).

The World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020. COVID-19 is now widespread throughout all countries. You can access the latest information on COVID-19 from the Australian Government [Department of Health](#).

## Who is at risk?

People most at risk of contracting the virus are people who have been in **close contact** with someone who is a **confirmed case** of COVID-19.

**Close contact** means greater than 4 hours close contact in any setting with a confirmed case in the period extending from 48 hours before onset of symptoms or the positive test in the confirmed case.

## How can you contract Covid-19?

Like the flu, the virus spreads from person to person via:

- droplets within the air produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- direct contact with an infected person
- touching objects or surfaces contaminated from droplets (coughing or sneezing) of an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

The World Health Organization has confirmed that the main driver of transmission is from symptomatic patients, through coughing or sneezing. Transmission by people without symptoms is possible, but rare.



## Symptoms of Covid-19

The following symptoms may occur 1 – 14 days after exposure – please note this is not an exhaustive list and any symptoms out of the ordinary should be treated as potentially infectious:

- fever
- cough
- shortness of breath
- sore throat
- fatigue
- loss of smell +/- taste
- backache
- rash

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe/testing/symptoms> (Current as at 07.02.22)

## Prevention of Covid-19

The best method of prevention is good hygiene habits such as:

- Washing hands often with soap and water (minimum 20 seconds) and completely dry
- Using alcohol based hand sanitiser
- Wearing a mask
- Wearing a face shield
- Covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing, but not using your hands to do so
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact and try to maintain a minimum distance of 1.5 metre from others
- If you are unwell, stay home and get tested for COVID-19



## What can you do while at work?

### Hygiene and Disinfection

We expect all employees to follow good hygiene habits as listed above. In addition to this, we ask that you:

- Wear a face mask within the hospital
- If possible, wear a face shield as well as a mask in situations where social distancing is difficult and when in close proximity of clients
- Do not share food and drinks, and eat outside in the fresh air when possible
- Ensure all plates, cups and cutlery are washed on a long hot cycle in the dishwasher.
- Stay home and seek medical advice if you are unwell or show any symptoms of Covid-19.
- Leave work if symptoms develop while in the workplace.

Enhanced disinfection and cleaning should be implemented as follows:

Use disinfectant wipes or F10 and a cloth to clean all surfaces every 6 hours minimum (6am, 12pm, 6pm, 12am). Surfaces include:

- iPads – should be wiped down between each use and between client usage
- Wall mounted iPad should be wiped over after every use
- Benchtops
- Desks
- Keyboards & mouse
- Phones
- Eftpos machine – disinfect after every use
- Door handles and around door handles where people push to open
- Drawer handles
- Chairs
- Water dispenser taps



It is the responsibility of all staff to assist in maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene standards of the hospital.

In addition we require staff:

- At the start of your shift, everyone should claim an iPad, phone and pen as his or her own for your shift. Disinfect these items prior to use. Label with a sticker if necessary. Wipe over to disinfect and remove any labels at the end of your shift.
- Vets should claim their own computer and/or consult room for their shift.
- Disinfect or wash your hands after any handling of cash, paperwork the client has handed you, or anything else that has been handled by a member of the public.
- Please bring and use your own cup for tea and coffee, if possible bring your own cutlery to use.

## Social Distancing

While we understand the difficulties of practicing social distancing within the hospital, where possible please:

- Keep a distance of 1.5m between yourself and other people
- Rearrange waiting room seats to minimise risk between clients
- Utilise support staff for animal handling during consultations will allow owners to distance themselves rather than being in close contact with the veterinarian
- Ask clients to limit visits to one person per animal being brought into the clinic
- Group meetings should be held via Zoom, or if held within the hospital must follow NSW guidelines at the time of the meeting
- Take meal breaks outside the hospital. If it is not possible to take your meal break outside, ensure you eat at a minimum distance of 1.5m from other workers

## Testing

We will supply rapid antigen tests to employees who are deemed moderate or high risk close contacts to a positive COVID case within the workplace. Risk assessments will be based on the matrix provided by NSW Health's '[Managing COVID-19 Contacts in a workplace](#)' (Current as at 07.02.2022)



### High Risk - Asymptomatic

Test prior to every shift including day 7.

### Moderate Risk - Asymptomatic

Test as soon as possible after exposure, and again on day 6 from the last day of contact.

### Symptomatic - Any risk category

If any symptoms arise, advise department coordinator, leave / do not attend work, perform RAT/PCR test, and do not return to work until advised by department coordinator / hospital administrator.

## What if I test positive for Covid-19?

Follow directions as per NSW Health, including:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/management> (Current as at 07.02.22)

If you have received a Covid-19 positive PCR or RAT result you must:

1. Notify your department coordinator immediately. Should they not be available, contact Kirrilea Kaye - Senior Hospital Administrator. The following information will be required:
  - a. Date symptoms first noted;
  - b. Date positive result recorded;
  - c. Any team members you have been in contact with in the 48 hours prior to testing positive
2. If you have received a positive RAT result and are **asymptomatic**, we recommend repeating the test with a different brand RAT or PCR to ensure it is not a false positive.
3. Register your positive RAT / PCR with Service NSW.  
[Register your RAT](#)
4. Isolate at home for at least 7 days from the day you had your positive test.
5. **You must stay at home until 24 hours after your symptoms have resolved.**



6. If you are a person at high risk of health complications, such as a pregnant woman, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, unvaccinated person over 16 years of age or immunosuppressed, then you need to call the NSW Health COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line on 1800 960 933.
7. If you have no symptoms at day 7 you can return to normal living, leave your home and return to work. You do not need a further test.
8. Wear a KN95 mask when interacting with other people and avoid visiting high-risk settings (health care, aged care, disability care or correctional facilities) for a further 3 days, KN95 masks should be worn in the workplace for 14 days post testing positive.
9. For a further 7 days after leaving isolation, you can help prevent the spread of Covid-19 by following the recommendations under [How can we all help slow the spread of Covid-19?](#)

**Always seek medical help if you become very unwell.**

See the [NSW Health Factsheet for Testing Positive to Covid-19](#) for further information.

## What if I have worked with someone who has tested positive to Covid-19?

To determine your level of risk of contracting Covid-19 and what steps to take please reference the table below and NSW Health's '[Managing COVID-19 Contacts in a workplace](#)' (Current as at 07.02.2022)

**Table 1:** The risk of infection for people who had close-range (<1.5m) contact with a case.

Type of close-range contact	Masks*	Risk
Direct physical contact	Yes or No	Moderate
Within 1.5m for less than 1 minute	Yes or No	Low
Within 1.5m for between 1 minute and 15 minutes <sup>†</sup>	Yes	Low
	No	Moderate
Within 1.5m for 15 minutes or more <sup>†</sup>	Yes	Moderate
	No	High

**Table 2:** The risk of infection for people who were in a room with a case for 15 minutes or more.

Size of room	Masks*	Risk
Less than 100 m <sup>2</sup>	Yes	Moderate
	No	High
Between 100 m <sup>2</sup> and 300 m <sup>2</sup>	Yes	Low
	No	Moderate
More than 300 m <sup>2</sup>	Yes or No	Low

\* Yes = masks properly worn by both case and contact for the duration of the period of contact. <sup>†</sup> Cumulative time over 24hrs



## Can you work if you are a close contact?

Veterinary services are on the list of critical workers with an exemption from the public health order for self-isolation (See [COVID Critical Worker Self Isolation Exemption Guidance](#) - current as at 07.02.2022). You can continue to work if your absence will have a high impact on the business' ability to provide essential services and you are unable to work from home. With approval from the Clinical Director, in consultation with your department coordinator, you can continue to work under the following conditions:

### High Risk - Asymptomatic

Test prior to every shift including day 7.

### Moderate Risk - Asymptomatic

Test as soon as possible after exposure, and again on day 6 from the last day of contact.

### While at work you must:

- Wear a KN95 mask at all times (provided)
- Clean and disinfect shared equipment thoroughly
- Maintain physical distancing where possible
- Take meal breaks outside. If not possible to take your meal break outside, eat in a room away from other workers
- Do not carpool and avoid public transport

[Critical worker exemption from the Public Health \(COVID-19 Self-Isolation\) Order \(No 4\) 2021 \(No 4\)](#)

## What if I have symptoms but tested negative for Covid-19?

If you have symptoms and your RAT is negative, self-isolate and do another RAT in 24 hours, or get a PCR test and self-isolate while you wait for your result. If your second test is negative, stay in isolation until your symptoms have gone. ([Getting Tested for COVID-19](#) Current as at 07.02.2022)



## Are you entitled to pay if you need to stay home?

- A permanent employee who is **unwell** or **caring for someone who is unwell** will be entitled to take personal/carers leave.
- A permanent employee who is **well** and wishes to self-isolate for their own reasons is not entitled to personal/carers leave (because they are not sick). They can request annual leave or leave without pay.
- A permanent employee who is **well** and clearly required to self-isolate based on NSW Health Covid-19 guidelines, or who is directed to isolate by a government official is not entitled to personal/carers leave (because they are not sick). They can request annual leave or leave without pay. They can apply for the [pandemic leave disaster payment](#). If they become unwell during the isolation period, they will be entitled to take sick leave.

This [video](#) from the AVA explains the criteria for taking personal / carer's leave.

## What if you do not have enough personal/carers leave available?

You can take annual leave or you can apply for the [pandemic leave disaster payment](#). If you have insufficient annual leave or are unable to receive the pandemic leave payment, speak to your manager about how we may be able to help you further.

## What about casual employees?

Unfortunately, casual employees are not entitled to paid leave.

## How can we protect staff and clients from other clients who may have or have been exposed to Covid-19?

During this pandemic we will move from performing contactless consultations, to allowing clients into the hospital. This will change regularly based on local outbreaks and risks. There will be guidelines we will need to follow when allowing clients into the hospital based on government regulations.

Please see our Contactless Consultation policies for further information on how these processes work.





## AVA guidelines for pets of COVID-19 positive/at-risk patients

The AVA have been advised that the risk to veterinarians from contact with pets from clients infected with COVID-19 is low. Infection usually requires prolonged close contact with someone who has a high viral load. Animals may have viral fomites on their coat, however the risk of infection is much lower as it will be a low viral load (similar to surfaces).

AVA recommend the following precautions:

- When initially handling animals from high risk environments, you must wear gloves, a mask, eye protection and a disposable apron. Remove PPE carefully, taking care not to touch the outside of masks, gowns and gloves.
- Watch the PPE for equine vets video which illustrates a number of levels of PPE, and practice PPE removal. <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf>
- Wash the animal if you are especially concerned, as soap will remove/deactivate the virus. If the animal does not require hospitalisation, or if this will cause undue stress to the animal, or its medical condition is such that it will be inadvisable to do so, we suggest using PPE as described above. The risk of transmission in such cases is thought to be low.
- Above all, practice and promote good hand hygiene.

## What if we are forced to close?

In the event that our hospital is forced to close, it is likely that the Stand Down provisions of the Fair Work Act will apply. This is where a business is forced to close for reasons outside the employer's control. Keep in mind, these provisions were primarily designed with natural disasters/extreme weather in mind, but it is highly likely the same will apply if businesses are forced to close due to Covid-19.

As per the stand down provisions, we are not required to pay staff. You can still request to take annual leave or long service leave if applicable. Otherwise it will be leave without pay.



## School Closures

Our schools will close at different stages throughout this pandemic. This will cause disruptions to our rosters. We are asking all staff to contact their roster manager immediately should they require time off when the schools close.

Your flexibility to help during this time will be greatly appreciated.

## References

<https://www.ava.com.au/coronavirus/>

<https://covid19.swa.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

<https://www.avant.org.au/Resources/Public/Coronavirus/#workplace-staff>

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6)

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>