

Department of Education: COVID-19 — List of Questions & Answers about Your Rights At Work

If you have a specific question or need help at work please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at your union office, we are here for you. You can email assistance@together.org.au or call **1800 177 244**.

What leave applies if you are unwell, if you are diagnosed with COVID-19 or if you are caring for someone at home (if they are in quarantine or need to be home due to school closure)?

Answer: If you are unwell you apply for sick leave, and if you run out of sick leave you can access the additional 20 days paid special pandemic leave. If you are caring for someone at home you might be able to work from home, or if you can't then access your sick (carers) leave.

If staff access pandemic leave/ special leave will you have your ADO as per the ADO agreements credited in order to ensure no disadvantage (or the need to take leave without pay during school holidays). We believe this is consistent with the Directive which says:

Existing conditions of employment will be applied to employment arrangements during a health pandemic wherever possible including specific hours of work arrangements.

and - 12. Policy

12.1 Government will make every effort to ensure that the employment conditions of its employees are not adversely affected during a health pandemic. Existing conditions of employment as provided for under relevant industrial instruments will continue to apply to employment arrangements during a health pandemic, including specific hours of work arrangements.

Can you please confirm this?

Answer: The Department have yet to officially confirm their answer to this but we believe the Directive is clear (and it says that you should be credited ADO you were scheduled to work) and we hope to have this confirmed tomorrow.

What will happen to animals at school farms if a school is closed? Will the animals be rehomed?

Answer: Schools with school farms will use normal disaster procedures and ask Agricultural Assistants to come in and feed and care for animals, however, schools with school farms need to have a business continuity plan that looks to – what if our Agricultural Assistant needs to isolate in their home? Can we move our animals offsite if the school is closed or movement is restricted?

If a workplace is shut down due to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 what happens?

Answer: If you are directed to not attend your workplace you might be directed to work at an alternative location or work remotely. If that isn't possible then you will receive your normal pay with no debit to your leave and you will come back to work when it is safe (so you will be home on full pay until it is safe).

If a school is closed will Schools Officers be required to work at the school and maintain the landscape and security of the site?

Answer: The department are still working out what things look like if they have to shut schools for more than a few days. It is possible that schools officers and other school staff may be asked to work at an otherwise closed site as long as it is safe to do so.

If a school is closed due to quarantine will school based public servants like AOs and BMs be asked to continue to manage the phones and facilities and HR from the site or will they be asked to telecommute?

Answer: The department are still working out what things look like if they have to shut schools for more than a couple of days. It is possible that BMs, AOs and other school staff (IT staff!) may be asked to work at an otherwise closed site as long as it is safe to do so. The department understand that most schools will not have laptop devices to deploy for AO staff, but some schools might. We also understand that some staff may be redeployed to assist with other areas of the emergency response.

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If a school or workplace is closed due to a confirmed COVID-19 case will existing school cleaners do the cleaning and is there sufficient PPE to do this? Or is there a special team?

Answer: The Department have said that if there is a confirmed case they will get specialist cleaners.

Do schools currently have the chemicals to clean sufficiently to stop a virus spreading from one surface to another? Is there guidance on this anywhere?

Answer: The Facilities team have sent guidance out about this.

What evidence will DoE be requiring of staff who need to access pandemic leave if they or their loved one don't have a medical certificate but they have had a telehealth consultation that asks them to quarantine?

Answer: The department are compiling this information and will come back to us. It is important that you don't come to work, and access your sick leave, if you are exhibiting any symptoms and need to be tested for COVID-19.

How do staff identify if they are immune-suppressed and need to access telecommuting or working remotely in order to maintain their safety at this critical time? What guidance is being issued to managers about supporting staff in this position to access remote working arrangements?

Answer: The department have indicated that "where possible, consideration should be given to these staff working from home. If working from home is not operationally viable, the staff member can access paid leave entitlements (sick leave, recreation leave, long service leave) where balances are available."

It is important to note that the whole of government framework is to support worker and community safety by saying that anyone who is at risk should be supported to work from home. Your union office is here to help if you have a worry about this issue.

Is the Department ready to deploy devices to facilitate telecommuting or remote working for any staff that need to?

Answer: This is being rolled out where possible but each work area will have different levels of readiness.

How will consultation with staff occur if teaching and learning is to be disrupted from usual processes for periods of weeks or months?

Answer: The Department have committed to continuing to consult with our union and they have set up meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we can discuss questions and emerging issues.

Will staff be encouraged to undertake meetings via teleconference or video conference now?

Answer: Yes where it is practical staff are making those changes for meetings and the new rules for physical distance mean that most meetings will be by teleconference. Teams can still meet if physical distance guidelines are in place.

Is there any job redesign being proposed in order to manage the unfolding situation?

Answer: The Department will work with us on this and how work will change as the pandemic unfolds.

What does the Department define as a "period of employment" to ensure that casual staff are paid under the Pandemic Directive?

Answer: This is to be confirmed ASAP (hopefully tomorrow).

If a temporary staff member is asked to quarantine or requires quarantine will they remain an employee and not have their employment ceased or terminated due to the pandemic?

Answer: The Department have not yet made this clear, we will keep asking.

Where the Directive is not clear will the department pay special leave or seek to enforce unpaid special leave?

Answer: We believe that paid special leave is available in most cases, but the Office of Industrial Relations will issue clarification soon.

Many schools have booked external builders or maintenance / external contractors for the coming holiday period. What will the department require to clean buildings that contractors have been in – how will this impact normal cleaning/ deep cleaning? Are the requirements to check that contractors will have the same stringent rules for their staff about not presenting to site if they are sick?

Answer: The Infrastructure Services Branch will come back to us about this issue.

What is the definition of a vulnerable person?

Answer: Queensland Health has determined those most at risk of serious infection if they contract COVID-19 are:

- Staff with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer);
- Staff with chronic medical conditions;
- Staff over the age of 60 particularly when combined with a chronic medical condition;
- Staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly over the age of 50.

What should I do if I have a vulnerable employee in my team?

Answer: Consideration should be given to withdrawing vulnerable staff members from face to face classroom instructional roles and, where practicable, providing them the opportunity to participate in alternative arrangements such as professional development, curriculum planning, resource development or other teaching and learning related activities at school.

Consideration can also be given to vulnerable staff members working from home completing similar duties.

Principals have the discretion to approve flexible working arrangements.

Principals can exercise discretion regarding the provision of supporting medical documentation.

Where a vulnerable employee is unable to participate in any form of alternative arrangements they may apply for special leave.

Can I send an employee home if they present to work unwell?

Answer: Where an employee presents at work unwell they can be directed by the Principal to go home. Leave will be deducted from the employee's sick leave balance.

My employee is required to care for a family or household member who is a vulnerable member of the community, what leave are can they take?

Answer: If a staff member is required to be the primary carer for a vulnerable member of the community they can apply for sick leave.