

[date]

[name]

[title]

[Employer]

[address line 1]

[suburb, STATE, Postcode]

Via email: [email address]

Dear [name],

As I write to you today, the new cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant are accelerating around the country at rates higher than worst case modelling scenarios at the very same time as state health authorities are easing restrictions and more workers are returning to offices. Yesterday saw the highest number of COVID-related deaths in NSW since the pandemic began and although genomic testing is also under significant pressure, experts are suggesting that the more serious Delta variant is still in circulation in the Australian community.

It is in this updated context that the FSU is seeking confirmation of your approach to the issues as set out under the headers below.

Paid Vaccination Leave

We find ourselves with very high (by international standards) vaccination levels, a feat accomplished in part due to the provision of paid vaccination leave to workers to ensure that they had the support to get their vaccines as quickly and with as few barriers as possible.

I write to you today to ask you to confirm that your paid vaccination leave will apply in the following circumstances:

1. That workers who are double vaccinated will be provided with paid leave to receive their booster shot or third dose, in line with health recommendations; and
2. To allow workers who are the carers of children aged 5-11, and 12-16 to take their children to receive a vaccine.

We will work with you to promote this entitlement and to encourage our members to get their booster shot and get their eligible children vaccinated as soon as the vaccines become available.

We believe that this is in the best interests of our members, their families, your staff and the community.

Paid Pandemic Leave

As the pandemic progresses and with the highly infectious Omicron strain, it will be essential that workers have access to multiple periods of paid pandemic leave to manage periods of self-isolation to minimise the spread of infection across workplaces and the community.

We ask that you confirm your paid pandemic leave policy and in particular request that you advise staff that sick/personal leave will not be required for testing and isolating purposes. Further, with the new year starting, we request that balances be topped up to reflect the full entitlement available to workers.

Working Arrangements

Given the current COVID-19 situation, we request that you confirm your approach to Working from Home and if required where workers are attending workplaces.

We also ask for an update on the approach you are taking with regards to the staffing levels across your retail network (if you have one). We are aware that some in some cases, that staffing levels are impacted due to both planned and unplanned absences as workers are now required to isolate. We are concerned at reports that in some cases, managers are directing staff to attend work while they are awaiting PCR results, and that branches are operating at minimum staffing levels which is placing our members under enormous pressure and consequently adversely impacting health and safety.

Rapid Antigen Testing

With public health advice on testing and isolating changing multiple times over the last 10 days, we request an update on the approach you will take to Rapid Antigen Testing in workplaces.

We believe Rapid Antigen Testing is another health and safety control measure that will ensure workplaces are safe. Further making the testing devices accessible to your frontline staff will take some pressure off our PCR testing capacity and household budgets.

Direct Exposure

It is important that staff who are knowingly exposed to COVID-19 at their workplace can take the appropriate measures to ensure their personal safety. As an employer despite public health orders, and the way each state is approaching this, employers can't abrogate themselves of their duty of care under the Health and Safety Act. This includes the need to test and isolate. We have heard that some employers are requiring staff to work even though a colleague at the same workplace has reported a positive case.

- What risk assessments are being undertaken to justify this position?
- Are you assessing each individual employees' circumstances as per some state guidelines?

- Are you informing staff about the process and results of the risk assessment?
- Are you going to provide Rapid Antigen Testing for any employee you are forcing to work after being exposed?

Given the urgency surrounding this situation, and the need for certainty, we'd appreciate a quick response to this request - no later than COB tomorrow to allow us to continue to keep our members informed in these difficult times.

Yours Sincerely,

[signature]

Julia Angrisano
National Secretary
Finance Sector Union