

COVID-19 UPDATE #24 – WARR on isolation exemptions list

Following the [National Cabinet meeting](#) on Thursday, 13 January 2022, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has outlined several changes to isolation restrictions for close contacts of a COVID-19 case.

To further ease the pressure on supply chains, the National Cabinet agreed to extend the easing of restrictions to a range of essential services. Waste management and resource recovery are on the essential workers/services list, including those who work in collection, treatment, storage, and disposal services. This means that close contacts are able to return to their workplace as long as they receive a negative Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) on day one (1); no isolation is required but workers must take a RAT every second day until day six (6). Interim guidance can be found [here](#).

The national guidance for close contacts was updated on 30 December 2021, with close contacts defined as household contacts of confirmed cases.

National Cabinet also noted that testing for people suspected to have COVID-19 or close contacts will continue to be provided for free through joint funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, utilising either PCR or RAT technologies.

Each state and territory will implement these changes to close contact arrangements for essential workers under respective state and territory public health orders and equivalent arrangements. The exemptions and measures in each jurisdiction, based on current advice on Monday, 17 January 2022, are as follows:

State/territory	Exemptions and measures
Victoria	<p>From 11.59pm, Tuesday, 18 January 2022, workers in critical utilities, which includes waste disposal, are eligible for exemption from close contact home isolation requirements to attend their workplace.</p> <p>To be eligible, workers must first notify their employers of their status as a contact, and critically, both parties must consent to the worker returning to the workplace. Workers are already required to be fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Strong measures will be required to reduce the risk of a contact attending work while infectious:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The worker must undertake a daily RAT for five (5) days and return a negative result prior to attending work each day.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They must wear a face mask at all times, with exceptions in the case of eating or drinking, or safety reasons, and a P2/N95 respirator is preferred. • The worker cannot enter shared break areas and the employer must try and facilitate solo break time. The employer must also take reasonable steps to deploy the worker in areas where transmission risk is lower. • If at any time the worker develops symptoms or tests positive on a RAT, the exemption no longer applies – they are a case, must isolate for seven (7) days, and must notify others including their employer. <p>Close contacts, otherwise known as household and household-like contacts, are people who have spent more than four (4) hours with a case inside a house, accommodation, or care facility.</p> <p>Further information.</p>
New South Wales	<p>Critical workers specified in the exemption order who are close contacts are permitted to leave self-isolation to attend work, only if they have no COVID-19 symptoms.</p> <p>The exemption order applies to a range of sectors, including waste and resource recovery services (including collection, treatment, and disposal services).</p> <p>A worker will only be eligible for the exemption if their employer determines that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their absence from the workplace poses a high risk of disruption to the delivery of critical services or activities; and • they are unable to work from home. <p>The exemption is subject to a number of conditions, including (but not limited to):</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical workers must travel directly to and from their home and their workplace(s). They cannot leave home for other purposes. • Critical workers must wear a mask at all times in the workplace, unless eating or drinking, or if the mask needs to be removed for safety reasons. • Critical workers must undergo daily RATs for a period of seven (7) days from when they last had contact with the diagnosed person and must notify their employer of each result. • Any person who tests positive for COVID-19 following a RAT must immediately self-isolate for seven (7) days under clause six (6) of the Order. <p>Any worker who tests positive or who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must self-isolate.</p> <p>Further information.</p>
Queensland	<p>An employer in a critical industry can identify and create a list of critically essential roles. A close contact who performs a critically essential role is considered a critically essential worker.</p> <p>Critically essential workers can then leave quarantine to carry out that role if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have no COVID-19 symptoms; and • are fully vaccinated. In the context of the direction for critically essential workers, to be fully vaccinated means two (2) doses of a vaccine and, if eligible, a booster shot. <p>Critical industries include utilities, though the waste and resource recovery sector has not been specifically listed.</p> <p>Employers will determine if their organisation or business is a critical industry and identify which roles are critically essential and must be physically in the workplace to do their job. This is a self-assessment process; however, employers will be</p>

	<p>required to notify the state government of roles they have identified as being critically essential.</p> <p>Further information.</p>
South Australia	<p>The SA government has provided permissions for close contact critical workers in the waste management industry to return to the worksite during their COVID-19 quarantine period.</p> <p>Requirements of a close contact critical worker include (but are not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critical worker must be separated from the person who is positive with COVID-19 and the seven (7)-day quarantine period commences on the date of last contact with the COVID-19 case. • The close contact critical worker must be fully vaccinated (including a third dose if eligible). • Must be completely free of COVID-19 symptoms. • Must have undertaken a PCR test prior to returning to work (can return whilst awaiting PCR result as long as that day's RAT is negative and may continue if PCR is negative). • Must maintain quarantine at all times when not onsite at work. • Must complete a RAT at the start of every shift they attend, inclusive of a daily RAT for days one (1) to seven (7) since last contact with a case; all RATs must be negative. <p>Further information.</p>
Western Australia	No updated advice at time of writing.
Tasmania	From 12pm Friday, 14 January 2022, a number of sectors will be able to apply for close contact exemption including power, utilities and essential infrastructure services, which include

	<p>water, waste and sewage. The temporary exemption fact sheet can be found here.</p> <p>Business will need to apply to WorkSafe for a close contact worker exemption and those who classify for an exemption can commence under this process from 15 January 2022 once approved.</p> <p>Exemptions from quarantine are only provided for workers in the identified sectors if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they are fully vaccinated, they are in quarantine because they have been identified as a close contact;• they are not a confirmed COVID-19 case;• they do not have symptoms of the disease;• their presence in the workplace is critical to the ongoing operation of a business in one (1) of the identified sectors;• they cannot perform the critical role remotely and are required to be physically present at the worksite;• there is no reasonable or available alternative to resolve the critical shortage other than to have the close contact in the workplace;• the worker is supportive of returning to work during their quarantine period and has agreed to the conditions of the exemption;• the worker has tested for COVID-19 (via RAT) and received the negative result every day they return to work including on the first day, before arriving at work; and• their return to work as a close contact has been registered by their employer through WorkSafe Tasmania before they arrive at the worksite. <p>Further information.</p>
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<p>Australia Capital Territory</p>	<p>The ACT government is exploring how essential workers who are close contacts and not sick can return to work. This will be based on health advice and the obligations employers have under the ACT work health and safety framework.</p> <p>Access to RATs and appropriate PPE are a key consideration. The government will work closely with unions and business groups to ensure exemptions work for employers and employees, with any arrangements to be voluntary.</p> <p>The government will outline in its guidance, the responsibilities of employers that exist under relevant work health and safety laws in their jurisdiction. Any testing done in the workplace must be done at no cost to the employee. This is also the case for the provision of other forms of PPE.</p> <p>Further information.</p>
<p>Northern Territory</p>	<p>Essential workers who are close contacts undertaking isolation may leave isolation to undertake their essential work if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they have no symptoms; • are fully vaccinated, having had at least two (2) doses of the COVID-19 vaccine; • have a negative RAT each day before attending work; and • monitor for symptoms. <p>An employee or contractor engaged by businesses to conduct domestic and commercial waste and resource recovery services, including collection, treatment, transfer and disposal services, is an essential worker. The full list of essential workers can be found here (from page 18).</p> <p>Essential workers are not required to go to work if they are close contacts in isolation but can choose to.</p> <p>Further information.</p>