

Victorian Premier announces 'roadmap' of lockdowns and restrictions for Metropolitan Melbourne

The Victorian Premier yesterday [announced](#) the Andrews Government's long-awaited 'roadmap' out of the current lockdown restrictions in Metropolitan Melbourne. It appears clear from the announcement that the Andrews Government has little faith in the capacity of its hospital system to cope with any increase in admissions due to COVID-19. As a result, the catastrophic impact the continued lockdown is having on **Metropolitan Melbourne** businesses that cannot operate from home, appears set to continue until **at least early November 2021**.

VACC is deeply disappointed with the announcement but will continue to consult with the Andrews Government to provide a practical plan to open more of the automotive industry, including arrangements currently available in the real estate industry.

VACC is particularly concerned that under the proposed **Metropolitan Melbourne 'roadmap'**, no meaningful removal of restrictions will occur until 80 percent of Victorians aged 16 and over are fully vaccinated – with 'COVID Normal' settings contingent on 80 percent of Victorians aged 12 and over being fully vaccinated. Fortunately for regional members, the proposed **Regional Victoria 'roadmap'** is significantly more practical.

The Victorian Premier also [announced](#) yesterday that the **City of Greater Geelong, the Surf Coast and Mitchell Shire** have entered a **seven-day lockdown** commencing at **11:59pm Sunday 19 September 2021**, with restrictions the same as those in place in the **City of Ballarat** – i.e. those that currently apply in **Metropolitan Melbourne, excluding the curfew**.

The Victorian Premier also noted that **Victoria's Chief Health Officer will assess vaccination requirements for all authorised workers in Victoria**, with requirements now in place via public health orders for aged care, construction, freight workers and healthcare workers. Therefore, whilst there is no indication that mandatory vaccinations are being actively considered for authorised workers in the automotive industry, it may be an opportune time for members that have not already done so, to give **serious consideration to starting a discussion with employees to actively encourage COVID-19 vaccination uptake**. Members can access a **template letter** [here](#).

Unless specific risk factors in the workplace and/or specific public health orders dictate otherwise, VACC recommends that consultation be focused on encouraging, rather than requiring, employee vaccination. Members considering introducing other COVID-19 related safety measures that go above and beyond their COVIDSafe Plans are encouraged in the first instance to contact the VACC OHSE Unit on 03 9829 1265 for further advice and assistance.

Work Permits

Authorised workers continue to be required to **carry permits** when working, and when travelling for work, in **Metropolitan Melbourne, City of Ballarat, City of Greater Geelong, the Surf Coast and Mitchell Shire**. Work permits will no longer be a requirement in Regional Victoria.

Face masks

Face masks must be carried at all times and **worn indoors and outdoors** except if at home, or when visiting an intimate partner's place of residence or if an exemption applies. This continues to apply in **Regional Victoria**, with an express requirement that **masks remain mandatory and cannot be removed for eating/drinking in retail facilities**.

Density quotients

For workplaces in **Regional Victoria**, and those authorised to remain open in Metropolitan Melbourne and the City of Ballarat, City of Greater Geelong, the Surf Coast and Mitchell Shire density quotients in shared spaces and publicly accessible areas at the work premises are **1 person per 4 square metres**, subject to the following:

- **Food and drink facilities (e.g. roadhouses) in Regional Victoria** – open for seated service only with maximum of 20 outdoors and 10 indoors, subject to density quotient of 1 person per 4 square metres. Food courts open for takeaway service only.
- **Office work environment in Regional Victoria** – 25 per cent or up to 10 people if total workplace is 40 people or less, subject to a density quotient of 1 person per 4 square metres.

QR Code Requirements

The electronic record keeping requirements through **Victorian Government QR Code Service** continue to apply for those businesses that are eligible to continue operating. The requirement to make reasonable efforts to ensure people check-in and to prominently display QR Code signage at each entrance remains unchanged.

COVIDSafe Plan

COVIDSafe Plans are mandatory for **all** Victorian workplaces. VACC recommends that COVIDSafe Plans should be reviewed to ensure it remains current and that cleaning, signage, record-keeping and other applicable requirements are being adhered to and communicated with all relevant staff. Members are encouraged to contact the VACC OHSE Unit for any further information or assistance, including in relation to their [COVIDSafe Plan obligations](#) on 03 9829 1265.

VACC also provides the following advice on frequently asked questions:

Can I stand down employees?

Members who are unable to operate as a result of the lockdown are advised to consult with affected employees about taking **paid annual leave, long service leave, or unpaid leave** during this period. VACC advises a similar approach may be taken by businesses who are unable to provide employees with their usual ordinary hours of work, as a result of the lockdown.

Where agreement is reached, a written record of the employee's request to take leave must be kept.

If agreement is unable to be reached and the business is unable to operate as a result of the lockdown, the employer is entitled to **stand down** the employee without pay.

Workers who suffer a reduction in hours as a result of a lockdown that commenced from 6 August 2021, will be able to access the increased payment amount of **\$750** for individuals that lose **20 hours or more** of work, and **\$450** for individuals that lose between **8 and 20 hours** of work, through the **Australian Government's COVID-19 Disaster Payment scheme**. No liquid asset eligibility test will apply, with applications to be made through [Services Australia](#).

Whilst members can access a **Reduction in Hours** template letter [here](#) and a **Stand Down** template letter [here](#), members considering implementing such arrangements are encouraged to contact our VACC Industrial Relations on 9829 1123 or ir@vacc.com.au for further advice and assistance.

What entitlements apply for employees required to self-isolate/quarantine?

Employees who have visited a location at the date and time where a COVID-19 case has visited – may be required by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to get tested and quarantine, despite not feeling unwell or not having any symptoms.

An employee is entitled to paid **personal/carer's** leave **only** in circumstances where they are unfit for work due to personal illness or injury – or in relation to carer's leave, where they are required to provide care or support to a member of the employee's immediate family or household – because of a personal illness or injury affecting the member, or an unexpected emergency affecting the member. Therefore, an employee who is required to quarantine is **not entitled** to paid personal/carer's leave **unless** they meet these requirements.

Where the employee has sufficient **annual leave (or long service leave)** accrued, an employer may approve this request. In certain circumstances an employer might also consider agreeing to a request for annual leave in advance (i.e. prior to the leave having been accrued). Such an agreement must be in writing and meet a number of requirements. It is therefore recommended that members considering granting leave in advance contact the IR Department for further information.

Where neither paid personal/carer's leave nor annual leave is appropriate, the employer may approve a period of **unpaid leave** for the employee. In such circumstances it is important to note that employees required to self-isolate or quarantine by DHHS may be eligible for the **Australian Government's \$1,500 Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment and/or the Victorian Government's \$450 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment**. Employees seeking further information on eligibility requirements can be directed to [Services Australia](#) and the [DHHS](#).

What financial support is available to affected businesses?

Members can access further information on current government-funded initiatives [here](#).

VACC will continue to keep members advised of developments. Members needing further advice or assistance are encouraged to contact VACC's Workplace Relations team.

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