

I understand that, as a result of the AEU's advocacy, the ACT Government is making Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) available to staff and students. When will I receive my RATs and how should I use them?

While the AEU sought to have RATs available prior to the resumption of on-campus learning, the ACT Government was not able to secure a sufficient supply to guarantee that all staff and students would have tests by day one, week one.

Tests will be provided ASAP to staff and students either prior to, or during the first week of term. We are awaiting further information on how RATs will be distributed to relief staff.

AEU members should follow the ACT Government advice about how to use their RATs. We understand that this advice will be distributed with the test kits.

At present, the priority is the use of the tests by people who have Covid-19 symptoms. When staff are asymptomatic, they may use the tests twice a week for health monitoring purposes (eg. On Monday and Wednesday).

I have a medical vulnerability – what are my options?

A vulnerable worker is someone who is likely to be at higher risk of serious illness if they contract Covid-19. ACTPS policy states that the following people may be considered vulnerable workers:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 70 years and older, and;
- People with compromised immune systems.

If there is a reasonable adjustment to your workplace or work location that will sufficiently mitigate your risk, talk to your manager to request this. You may need medical evidence to support your request.

If you meet the criteria for medical vulnerability, notify your manager and contact the Education Directorate HR team on EDUHR@act.gov.au. You will need medical evidence that demonstrates your eligibility under the criteria linked above. With this, work from home may be possible, or otherwise Covid-19 leave applies.

I have tested positive for Covid-19 – what happens now?

You will be able to access Covid-19 leave for up to 7 consecutive calendar days. If you're still unwell after that time, you will then need to access personal leave. You will be entitled to Covid-19 leave for each, separate occasion on which you are infected (ie. if you are infected more than once).

Follow all advice from ACT Health and notify your manager.

I am a high risk or household contact and thus need to quarantine – what happens now?

If you are required to quarantine or isolate in line with public health directions, notify your manager. They can advise whether it is possible for you to work from home. If it is not possible, then Covid-19 leave will apply.

While it may be possible for staff who are exempt essential workers to attend, there are strict health and work safety requirements that must be met before the employer can grant an exemption. Guidance from Worksafe ACT is currently under consultation and is available here:

[Guidance-Note-Exempt-Essential-Workers.pdf \(act.gov.au\)](#)

Note that the draft guidance is clear that a worker should only be exempted where there is no lower risk option available. This may include options such as a transition to remote learning.

The AEU has received assurances from the ACT Education Directorate that no exempt essential worker will be forced to attend work against their wishes and that exempt staff will be allowed to complete their quarantine period if they wish.

I have symptoms of Covid-19 – what should I do?

If you have the symptoms of Covid-19, you should not attend the workplace. You should access personal leave as you are unfit to work while experiencing these symptoms. You should access testing as per ACT Health requirements. If you are consequently required to quarantine, Covid-19 leave applies if working from home is not possible.

What if I exhaust my personal leave?

There may be options to anticipate (i.e. bring forward) your personal leave for the following year in the event that your personal leave balance is exhausted.

If you believe that you will exhaust your personal leave, please contact your manager and the AEU office for advice and support.

I am a casual employee. How does this affect me?

To be eligible for payment in the event of contracting Covid-19 or needing to quarantine, you need to have been employed on a 'regular and systematic basis'. For example, having a weekly booking at a school would make you eligible.

The ACTPS sets out the following guidelines [in this policy](#):

- *Where an eligible casual employee has scheduled or agreed shifts during a period of quarantine or self isolation – they are to be paid for those shifts*
- *Where an eligible casual employee has worked regular hours in the past month before a period of quarantine or self-isolation with no scheduled or agreed shifts during the quarantine or self-isolation period - they are to be paid for any shifts based on their previous pattern of work.*
- *Where the casual employee has worked irregular hours in the past month before a period of quarantine or self-isolation with no scheduled or agreed shifts – they may be paid an average of the hours worked in the past month for the period of the quarantine or self-isolation.*
- *Where a casual employee has not worked within the month prior to the quarantine or self-isolation period – they will not be paid for the period of the quarantine or self-isolation.*

Please note that the 'month prior' stipulation would mean the prior 4 weeks of the school year, including the end of term 4 if necessary.

Additionally, the AEU has secured short term contracts for many casuals for term 1, making them eligible for leave provisions like other workers.

Are there plans for what will happen if there are increased staff absences at my school?

Yes. The AEU has consulted on scenario planning for what happens if staff absences limit a school's capacity to deliver on-site learning. Your principal will be the first contact for you if this happens. Decision-making will be the responsibility of principals or the Directorate, depending on the severity of the situation. The AEU will continue to advise members and advocate on members' behalf through these processes.

There is a high-level matrix that has been developed with indicators for when schools should move between different levels.

My school has had to split and combine classes due to absences and I've been asked to take a couple of extra students in my class for the day. Is this a breach of the Class Sizes Policy?

The class sizes policy is intended for business-as-usual operation and members should expect that, wherever practicable, the policy will be followed.

However, where circumstances beyond the school's control mean that classes must be split or combined, it may be reasonable to take a couple of additional students where it is safe to do so. Whether this is safe will depend on factors such as the number of additional students, the size of the room, existing Covid-safe requirements, high-risk or specialist nature of a class or any OVRA, ILP or PBSP requirements.

While members may agree to take on additional students, steps should be taken to reduce any associated additional workload. This may include measures such as distributing the additional students evenly across a number of classes and clarifying that there is no expectation that staff will run an additional, concurrent program to accommodate the "split" students. In most cases, their role should be limited to supervision of the additional students.

Where class sizes will become very large because of the absences, schools should consider whether it is appropriate to move to level 2 or 3 measures within the staff absence planning matrix, including moving to a model of supervised learning in preparation for a potential school closure.

The Covid measures are creating an unreasonable workload for me and my colleagues. What can we do?

In 2021, particularly in term 4, school staff reported excessive workloads at all levels. We have made clear to government that it is our expectation that expectations on schools will be adjusted to ensure that the workload is manageable.

At this stage, this includes a temporary moratorium on new programs. We are also in discussions with the Directorate about how to mitigate the workload associated with tasks including risk assessments, ILPs, PBSP, OVRAs, reporting and assessment and other school functions.

If your workload is unmanageable, you should raise this concern with your manager. If the issue cannot be resolved, you should contact the AEU office for further advice.

Can I be required to provide online teaching while I am also responsible for face-to-face teaching?

No. In response to the AEU raising ongoing member concerns, the Education Directorate has made it clear that teachers are not required or expected to be engage in simultaneously teaching face-to-face and online.

What are schools doing to ensure adequate ventilation?

All schools have an Indoor Air Quality Plan and continue to review and update ventilation assessments. Outdoor learning will be encouraged wherever possible. School HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems will be adjusted to increase the fresh air being supplied to classrooms. Classrooms that are not connected to these systems have external natural ventilation so that fresh air source can be readily controlled. Previously fixed closed windows are being re-opened after re-assessing the safety reason for their closure.

The AEU is advised that Infrastructure and Capital Works staff are conducting a complete assessment of every Education Directorate workplace to ensure that all spaces are adequately ventilated. Where this is not possible, alternative control measures (such as limiting use of those spaces) should be expected. Members should raise concerns with their manager or their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance.

Why not just use air purifiers (HEPA filters)?

Sometimes the simplest safety measures are the best. Outside air ventilation is the most effective control measure (for example, through mechanical ventilation systems or opening windows). Air purifiers are a secondary safety measure. They do not replace natural and mechanical ventilation methods but may complement them. There is insufficient evidence at present to show that air purifiers are effective at reducing or preventing Covid-19 transmission.

The ACT Government has announced \$5.7million in funding towards measures to improve Covid safety in schools, including improvements to ventilation systems and building works.

What will happen if it is very hot/cold/there is bushfire smoke and we can't leave the windows open?

Schools will need to develop plans for managing circumstances where the usual measures for ventilation are disrupted. These will vary site-by-site and may depend on factors such as the availability of appropriate mechanical ventilation. Schools should already have plans for managing extreme temperatures in accordance with Directorate policy.

Members should raise concerns with their manager or via their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance.

I have questions about my school's Covid plans – who should I direct them to?

Members should raise questions with their manager or via their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance. Members can also consult the information, including FAQs, provided by the Directorate on its internal and external websites.

Will there be access to Personal Protective Equipment and sanitising equipment at my site?

Yes. Each site will be required to complete a checklist to ensure there is adequate PPE and cleaning supplies available. The checklist includes hand sanitiser, hand wash and paper towels, masks, gloves, and disinfectant wipes.

If students are non-compliant with the direction to wear masks indoors, what can I do to handle the situation? Who do I call? What are my options to remove them from my class?

Students who are required to wear masks can be given a direction to wear a mask by any school staff member, in accordance with regular student engagement practices.

If a student refuses to comply with the staff member's direction, the staff member should follow the school's usual process for dealing with persistent non-compliant behaviour, including seeking support from an executive teacher to ensure that the student either complies with health and safety requirements or is removed from class.

Persistent, non-compliant behaviour that presents a risk to health and safety may lead to the student being suspended from school or diverted to an alternative program of learning where their behaviour will not place others at risk.

I am not satisfied with the PPE I have been provided. Can I request (for example) an N95 mask?

The AEU has advocated for the availability of higher quality PPE, including N95 masks. While these are not considered a health requirement, we understand that staff can have a conversation with their manager if they would prefer an N95 mask or other PPE and that those requests will be considered.

My question wasn't answered above – who can I speak to?

Members can contact the AEU office on aeuact@aeuact.org.au or 6272 7900 for support. You can also speak to your manager, others in your school leadership team, or the Education Directorate's HR team at EDUHR@act.gov.au.