

## COVID-19 and Union Health

Categories : [COVID19](#)

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Dear Members

Still no good news on the COVID-19 front. There was an additional 390 cases on Friday, and another 466 cases today. There are still only a small proportion of these in isolation meaning that we are likely to see even higher numbers over the coming days. This morning, the Government reduced the existing 10km rule to 5km for Greater Sydney, further restricting our movement without a reasonable excuse.

Although the vaccine rollout is still woefully inadequate, it does seem to be accelerating, which is a good thing if we ever want to get out of this crisis.

The list of Local Government Areas (**LGA**) subject to lockdowns is an ever-growing list, with many added to the list this week. Concerningly, the following LGAs in regional NSW have gone into lockdown:

- Byron Shire
- Richmond Valley
- Lismore
- Ballina
- Armidale
- Tamworth
- Bogan
- Bourke
- Brewarrina
- Coonamble
- Gilgandra
- Narromine
- Walgett
- Warren

As well as the suburbs listed above, much of Greater Sydney and the Hunter Region remains in lockdown, and the ACT entered lockdown late this week.

Given the extent of the LGAs currently subjected to lockdown, it is important to remember what this means:

- If a person enters the LGAs with a reasonable excuse such as for the delivery of goods or passengers, and exits their vehicle, they must follow the stay-at-home restrictions for 14 days when they return to their place of residence. Stay at home rules are not the same as self-isolating. You can still leave your home if you have a reasonable excuse, including for

freight-related work.

- The stay-at-home direction does not apply to persons who travel through the LGAs and do not exit the vehicle.
- Masks must be worn indoors (not including the home) and in outdoor settings where you cannot socially distance from others (eg. while queuing for takeaway).

Members at Leichhardt Bus Depot saw a set back this week when a positive COVID case and associated close and casual contacts of that case, saw a shutdown of the workplace. The shutdown compromised services throughout the inner-west and revealed the fragility of the public transport network. Unfortunately, we are still seeing issues with private bus operators either ignorant or flouting the rules, particularly in relation to directions issued by NSW Health.

And on that point, it is important for all members to remember that NSW Health hold a monopoly on COVID directions. If you are told to do something by NSW Health, that is what you must do, even if your employer tells you to do something different.

The RTBU has called on Transport Minister Andrew Constance to prioritise the urgent rollout of rapid COVID testing and vaccination of Transport Workers. Transport Workers should have been prioritised workers for vaccines from the start of the rollout, and there is no excuse not to do so now.

Several workplaces have now seen the introduction of daily saliva testing to ensure that their operations remain COVID free. The Transport Management Centre, Rail Operations Centre, and Petersham Learning and Development Centre all have a requirement for daily saliva testing to identify those with COVID and stop them from introducing it to those vital workplaces.

The public debate around mandating vaccination for certain industries continued this week, with the Fair Work Ombudsman (**FWO**) issuing new advice to employers on when they can require their employees to be vaccinated. The jury is still out on whether employers can require vaccination or not absent government legislation, however the FWO listed several “tiers” of work more likely to have vaccination mandated:

**Tier 1 work:** Where employees are required as part of their duties to interact with people with an increased risk of being infected with coronavirus (for example, employees working in hotel quarantine or border control).

**Tier 2 work:** Where employees are required to have close contact with people who are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of coronavirus (for example, employees working in health care or aged care).

**Tier 3 work:** Where there is interaction or likely interaction between employees and other people such as customers, other employees or the public in the normal course of employment (for example, stores providing essential goods and services).

**Tier 4 work:** Where employees have minimal face-to-face interaction as part of their normal employment duties (for example, where they are working from home).

Our National Secretary, Mark Diamond, wrote an opinion piece for the Newcastle Herald on Friday about the lack of leadership from the Federal Government when it comes to the vaccine roll out. You can find the article [here](#). In the piece, the RTBU called on the Federal Government to:

1. Ensure we have adequate supply of vaccines
2. Place Rail Tram and Bus workers in a high priority bracket for vaccinations
3. Bring vaccinations to workers in their workplaces
4. Incentivise vaccinations with cash payments and the promise that freedoms will return
5. Take responsibility for the roll out of vaccinations, rather than obfuscate.

Unfortunately, NSW is in a mess, and the leadership required to get us out is sadly absent. This is not something we will get out of by chance, it will take a concerted and well planned course of action. Let's just hope that somebody steps up to the plate.

As usual, remember your health and safety is our highest priority. If you have any COVID related issues, please get in touch with your delegate.

We also wanted to give members a quick update about the union's health fund.

We want to ensure our members are looked after by a health fund that's owned by members, with union values at the core of everything they do.

**That's why we've now partnered with [Union Health](#) - the fairer health fund for union members and their families. [Click here to find out more.](#)**

