

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
Minister for Equality



Wednesday, 15 December 2021

UPDATED PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTIONS TO KEEP VICTORIANS SAFE

With more than 92 per cent of eligible Victorians double dose vaccinated, coronavirus restrictions are being updated to ensure Victorians enjoy more freedoms this festive season, keeping themselves and their families safe while the Omicron variant is monitored and investigated.

Minister for Health Martin Foley will today sign pandemic orders under the new *Public Health and Wellbeing Act*, which will come into effect from 11.59pm tonight and be in place until 12 January 2022.

The Minister has made the decision to sign the pandemic orders after considering advice from the Chief Health Officer (CHO) that there continues to be a serious risk to public health from the global pandemic, and that restrictions continue to be necessary to protect Victorians and the healthcare system.

In particular, the CHO has highlighted the need to gather more information about the Omicron variant of concern before considering further changes to protective measures – such as mask requirements.

All Victorians who are eligible for a booster five months after their second shot are urged to book an appointment as soon as possible – especially those at higher risk of contracting the virus, such as healthcare workers.

Ensuring children are protected from coronavirus is also vital, and parents are encouraged to get their kids vaccinated when the rollout for five to 11-year-olds begins on 10 January 2022.

As part of the orders, people under 18 will no longer be required to show proof of their vaccination status at all venues, such as hospitality.

The mandatory vaccination requirement will be removed for all customers in retail, except hair and beauty services, and will also be removed in real estate, places of worship, weddings and funerals. Mask settings in retail remain unchanged.

Under the pandemic orders, restaurants, cafes, bars and pubs are still only open to fully vaccinated patrons and staff. Workers are required to wear masks.

Face masks no longer need to be worn at weddings, funerals, or ceremonial settings. If these events are held at places of worship there will not be any vaccination requirements or limits on participants, nor any requirement for organisers to check vaccination status. If the ceremony is at a hospitality setting, vaccine requirements will apply.

Workplaces exposed to a positive coronavirus case will no longer need to be deep cleaned, after mounting international evidence that coronavirus is an airborne or droplet-borne disease and the likelihood of becoming infected by touching a surface is very low risk.

In addition, tour and transport operators, gyms and creative arts premises such as theatres and cinemas will not need to clean equipment between uses. Workplaces will still need to maintain CovidSafe plans.

Elective surgery rules are also being updated, with rural and regional health services able to resume up to 75 per cent of normal elective surgery activity.

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The order, the CHO advice, the Minister's Statement of Reasons and the Human Rights Statement will be published on the Department of Health website within seven working days of the orders coming into effect.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"More than 92 per cent of eligible Victorians are double dosed vaccinated, giving us the opportunity to enjoy a greater level of freedom across the state."

"These measures strike a balance between the risk of community transmission, and the protection that comes from being one of the most vaccinated jurisdictions in the world."

"All Victorians are eligible for a booster shot five months after their second dose and are urged to book an appointment as soon as possible. This will keep families safe during the holiday period and help slow the spread of the virus."