

# Student Clinical Placements and COVID-19 QRG



COVID - 19

Be Safe -- Be Smart -- Be Kind

## General

Students are recognised as part of the healthcare workforce and are permitted to continue clinical placements during the ongoing COVID-19 environment, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Unless specifically stated, all organisational QRGs are applicable to students while on placement at Western Health (WH).

Students should adhere to [Keeping Safe at Work during COVID-19](#) recommendations at all times throughout their placement. These include but are not limited to:

- Keeping 1.5m apart from others wherever possible
- Maintaining good hygiene
- Staying home when unwell
- Keeping yourself and colleagues safe and informed
- Keeping the environment clean
- Remaining compliant with all current WH Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines

## Essential Worker Permits

In the event that public health advice mandates work travel permits for authorised or essential workers, all students will require an Authorised Worker permit in order to attend on-site clinical placements. Further details regarding the parameters for student permits will be outlined in the most current Victorian Department of Health Student Placement Guidance. It is the responsibility of the Education Provider (EP) to issue work travel permits for clinical placements.

## Pre- Placement Screening

Students may be screened prior to commencing placement by their relevant WH placement coordinator using a pre-placement screening tool. For advice on recommended screening questions, please refer to the current [Staff Daily Attestation Paper Version](#) QRG. Each Discipline will determine their own pre-placement screening process. At a minimum, the daily attestation should be completed by the student prior to on-site attendance. Further details regarding attestation requirements can be found in the Daily Screening section of this QRG.

Students are not required to be routinely tested for COVID-19 prior to commencing a new clinical placement at a health service, unless required to do so under asymptomatic testing guidance, including if they have visited any public [exposure sites](#).

## Student COVID-19 Vaccinations

The announcement of mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for all Victorian healthcare workers applies to all students attending on-site placements at WH. The same mandatory vaccine timeframes for staff at WH apply to students on placement at WH. In addition, the same minimum PPE requirements applied for those who are not fully vaccinated in the interim period to 30 October and 15 December, 2021 will apply to students on placement at WH.

From October 15, 2021 onwards, all students will be required to provide evidence of their vaccination status to be permitted to continue their placement on-site at WH. All students commencing placement after this date will be required to provide evidence of their vaccination status prior to being permitted to attend on-site placements.

From October 30, 2021, all students attending on-site placements at WH must provide evidence that they:

- have received a full COVID-19 vaccination of two doses OR
- have received one COVID-19 vaccination dose and have arranged a second dose booking by December 15, 2021.

Each Discipline will determine their own process for collecting and recording student vaccination status evidence.

Students are encouraged to book their COVID-19 vaccination via the usual booking process. In the event that WH provide rapid or walk-in staff access to COVID-19 vaccinations, students currently on placement can access these vaccinations in the same manner as staff.

## Student Employment in Settings External to their Clinical Placement

Many students undertake part-time employment during their studies. If a student is employed within a health service or facility which is experiencing an active outbreak and/or another workplace listed as a community exposure site, the student may be advised to get tested, quarantine and seek further advice from the Department of Health. Students will not be permitted to undertake clinical placements during this period of quarantine.

If a student works in a COVID streaming area at another health service, or has worked with a COVID-19 positive or high risk suspected patient within the last 14 days, this should be disclosed to WH prior to on-site attendance. Each Discipline will determine their own process for reviewing and recording external student employment. At a minimum, student external work should be disclosed via the daily attestation. The Discipline Student Lead is responsible for informing students of their obligations to disclose external work and ensuring that appropriate safeguards are put in place to minimise risk as outlined in the [Healthcare Worker Movement during COVID-19](#) QRG.

Students should not undertake a clinical placement at a WH facility if they have worked or volunteered at a hotel quarantine site and/or port of entry within the last 14 days.

### **Movement between Sites**

During COVID Peak, student movement between WH sites during a clinical placement should be limited (with the exception of attending the Sunshine Hospital COVID Testing Clinic for testing).

Where movement between sites during the same clinical placement is deemed a necessary part of the learning experience, compliance with WH directives, as outlined in the [Healthcare Worker Movement during COVID-19](#) QRG is essential. This includes:

- Seeking permission from the relevant Executive Director
- Completion of the daily attestation and declaring all sites at which the student has worked at
- Compliance with surveillance testing requirements as required (i.e. if working in a high risk area)

Regular movement of individual students between sites is strongly discouraged. Student coordinators are encouraged to plan placement experiences that encompass as many learning opportunities within the one site.

### **Vulnerable Students**

It is recommended that the EP determine a student's suitability for placement prior to allocation, including determining if they are classed as vulnerable. Where it becomes known to WH that a student on placement may be vulnerable, the following criteria should be applied when determining their status: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions; people 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions; people 70 years and older, people with compromised immune systems, people who are over 28 weeks pregnant.

If the student meets any of these criteria, please contact the relevant Discipline student lead. Student leads should refer to the [Vulnerable Staff during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) QRG or contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries for further advice.

### **Daily Screening**

All students are to complete the COVID-19 Symptom Check and Attendance Log (daily attestation) log prior to starting each shift on-site. It is recommended that the daily attestation is completed online via <https://tinyurl.com/WHstaffcheck>. Placement coordinators are responsible for informing students of this requirement and the appropriate fields to complete. If it is usual practice in the student's clinical area to complete a paper based daily attestation, this is an acceptable alternative.

Students are required to regularly check the [public exposure sites](#) list at the frequency currently recommended by WH. Should the student have attended a listed exposure site, they should inform their placement supervisor and their EP and follow appropriate Department of Health guidance (including leaving the placement site and seeking testing immediately if they have attended a Tier 1 or 2 exposure site). Students and their supervisors may wish to contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries or their relevant Manager / Discipline Student Lead for advice. The [Contact with Public Exposure Sites](#) QRG should be consulted to determine the most appropriate pathway for notifications related to exposure sites.

## Illness

Students are not to attend placement if they are unwell, even with mild symptoms.

If students experience any of the listed symptoms on the daily symptom check, they are to not attend placement. Students should notify their placement supervisor and contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries to receive further advice.

Symptoms of concern include: fever, temperature, chills, acute respiratory infection including cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss or change in sense of smell or taste, new onset of other symptoms which could be consistent with COVID-19 including headache, muscle aches, stuffy nose, nausea vomiting or diarrhoea.

For information regarding how to contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries, please see below under Student Enquiries.

It is strongly advised that students be tested at Western Health operated testing clinics. The full list of testing sites and operating hours can be accessed [here](#). If students choose to be tested elsewhere, WH is not responsible for delays in results and therefore, days of placement missed.

Students are advised to inform testing site operators that they are on student placement and are to be tested as healthcare workers.

If students are tested, it is the student's responsibility to inform the EP and their clinical placement supervisor that they have been tested. They must also inform the aforementioned parties of their results once they have been received. Where applicable, the clinical placement supervisor is responsible for informing the Departmental clinical placement coordinator of any student testing required and the outcome.

Students will be required to follow the advice given to them regarding isolation until they have received their results.

Students with a negative test result are not to return to placement until they are symptom free.

Students are to inform their clinical placement supervisor of any positive test result that occurs up to 14 days post the completion of their placement for the purpose of contact tracing.

## Personal Protective Equipment

As a prerequisite to undertaking clinical placement within WH, the EP should provide basic education and training on correct use of PPE (including donning/doffing, fit check practices and mask disposal) to their students. This is to ensure students are familiar with basic PPE requirements and fit checking concepts and processes prior to commencing placements.

As per their OHS responsibilities, WH will provide students with further orientation and training on donning/doffing and fit checking procedures on commencement of their placement. This further training is essential to contextualise PPE requirements to specific placement settings and area of practice.

All students are required to undertake training in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and be familiar with [WH specific PPE policies and guidelines](#). It is mandatory for all students to complete the Standard and Transmission Based Precautions module on Welearn prior to attending on-site placements. This module may be supplemented by information on the [COVID microsite](#), Department of Health PPE modules or discipline/area specific resources and training.

Students will be provided with all appropriate PPE; including a reusable face shield, masks, gloves and gowns. Selection of appropriate levels of PPE, including respiratory protection equipment such as face masks and P2/N95 respirators, should be in accordance with the risk of COVID-19 exposure within a specific clinical setting/environment.

## Fit Testing

The need for a student to be fit tested before commencing a clinical placement is contingent upon the area of the health service in which the student will be placed.

For students placed on designated COVID wards (final year students only) and providing care/intervention to COVID positive cases, fit testing for N95/P2 respiratory protection is required before commencing in the clinical setting. Similarly, students based in settings where exposure to high-risk SCOVID patients is likely, should also be fit tested prior to commencing placement.

For students in other clinical settings, education on fit checking procedure is an appropriate interim strategy, and placements can proceed while awaiting fit testing (in line with existing prioritisation of healthcare workers awaiting fit testing).

Arranging student access to fit testing is a shared responsibility between WH and the EP. To support continuity of placements, WH welcome the support of EPs to arrange timely fit testing of

their student cohorts by building in-house fit testing capacity or contracting an external fit testing provider.

Students should be provided with written evidence of the completion of a fit test, irrespective as to whether the fit test is administered by WH, the EP or a third-party provider. This evidence should take the form of a fit test certificate or card, verifying the date of the fit test and the recommended respirator make/model(s) specific to the individual student. It is suggested that students save a photo of their fit test to ensure they have a back-up record for future reference.

For allied health therapies and sciences, nursing and midwifery students, several data-fields have also been built within the Placeright system to record fit testing completion. Data entry is accessible to both WH and the EP. Where fit testing is undertaken at WH, the relevant Placeright administrator is encouraged to enter fit testing results into Placeright. This information is then visible to all health service placement providers where the student may undertake further clinical placements and may help avoid unnecessary fit testing duplication.

## Student Working Areas

Final year students are able to provide care/intervention to confirmed COVID cases, and be placed on designated COVID wards, with the following safeguards in place:

- fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and
- have been N95/P2 mask fit-tested prior to the commencement of their placement, and
- have/will receive training in correct donning/doffing of PPE (i.e. either prior to commencement of their placement or upon orientation).

Where practicable, all other student year levels should not care for patients who are confirmed COVID cases at any time and should not be placed on a defined COVID streaming ward where all patients have been confirmed as testing positive for COVID-19. Non-final year students can continue on placement if there is a confirmed COVID case within the relevant clinical setting, provided that they have not been deemed a close contact.

For example, placements may continue if there is a confirmed COVID case/s on the ward (ideally quarantined within a separate room or bed bay), though the student should not provide direct care to that patient.

Non-final year students may also be placed in a setting where they may come into contact with a suspected COVID case or a patient who may potentially test positive to COVID-19 (such as emergency departments, ICU's, maternity wards and other hospital environments). In these areas, the following safeguards must be put in place:

- fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and
- where practicable, be based within clearly designated areas for the management of non-COVID patients within the relevant setting (e.g. ED, ICU or ward area), and



- have been fit-tested for N95/P2 PPE prior to the commencement of their placement, and
- have/will receive training in correct donning/doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (i.e. either prior to commencement of their placement or upon orientation).

### Potential Student Exposure to COVID-19 and Asymptomatic Testing

Students who come in to contact (even transient contact) with a COVID-19 positive or high risk suspected COVID-19 case should follow any advice given to them by the Department of Health and WH. If the student is not deemed a close contact and advised they can safely continue their placement, they are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance for symptoms and participate in COVID-19 surveillance testing. Please refer to the WH [COVID-19 Asymptomatic Staff Screening Surveillance Testing Guideline](#) QRG for further information.

In the event that an active outbreak occurs at WH in an area that a student is undertaking a clinical placement in, they should follow any advice given to them by the Department of Health and WH regarding isolation, testing and surveillance.

Both the student and the Departmental placement coordinator are responsible for informing the EP of any potential exposures at WH involving a student. In some cases, these EP may provide additional instructions for the student with regards to isolation, testing and surveillance. These instructions should be followed in addition to those previously mentioned.

During periods of community COVID-19 presence, WH may offer asymptomatic testing for any concerned staff. This asymptomatic testing will also be made accessible to students currently on placement at WH. Current asymptomatic testing locations and availability can be accessed [here](#).

### Contact Tracing

Attendance logs will be collected as part of the daily attestation process. Students should be included on all attendance records, room logs, ward/department logs and break area logs. These records are to be provided to Infection Prevention or the contact tracing team should contact tracing be required.

All students must provide an out of hours contact number to the relevant placement supervisor or Discipline Student Lead. Each discipline will determine their own process for collecting and recording student out of hours contact numbers. In addition, the student's contact number should be recorded in their daily attestation.

### Break Areas

Students are considered staff and not visitors to the health service. Students are encouraged to make use of any designated staff meal or break-out areas during their break times.

## Student Enquiries

Students can access the Western Health Coronavirus microsite at any time via <https://coronavirus.wh.org.au>.

Students are encouraged to contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries when directed to by a member of WH staff or when recommended by our screening processes and protocols. This can be done by emailing [whscovidstaffclinicenquiries@wh.org.au](mailto:whscovidstaffclinicenquiries@wh.org.au) or by phoning the WH switchboard on 8345 6666 and selecting option 1.

Further WH COVID related contacts and testing opening hours can be located via this [link](#).

## Wellbeing and Support

Students are advised to contact their EP and clinical placement supervisor with any questions or issues regarding their wellbeing.

Students are encouraged to visit the wellbeing and support section of the [WH coronavirus microsite](#) for further information regarding wellbeing and support.

If students require counselling services, they are encouraged to discuss this with their supervisor and EP and follow the usual procedures for accessing wellbeing support within their University or TAFE.

## Key Contacts for Student Placements at WH

For general, non-urgent student related queries, contact [studentplacements@wh.org.au](mailto:studentplacements@wh.org.au).

Discipline specific queries should be directed to the following Discipline student leads:

- Allied Health – Laura Browning 0466 631 477
- Medical Imaging – Adam Steward 0403 008 754
- Medicine – Clare Powell-Gray 0456 235 952
- Midwifery – Emma Heard 0466 489 731
- Nursing – Emma Thaus 0466 492 154
- Pharmacy – Jenny Lau 0466 377 535

## References

This document is based on the following WH and the Victorian Department of Health documents:



Victorian Department of Health - Health Service Planning: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-service-planning-covid-19>. Contains the current Student Clinical Placements COVID-19 Guidance and Fit Testing Requirements to Support Clinical Placements.

Victorian Department of Health – Health Service Guidance and Response to COVID-19 Risks: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks>. Contains the current Movement of Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic Guidance and Risk Ratings

Western Health Quick Reference Guides: <https://coronavirus.wh.org.au/quick-reference-guides/>. Includes: Keeping Safe at Work during COVID-19, Healthcare Worker Movement during COVID-19, Staff Daily Attestation Paper Version, Contact with Public Exposure Sites, COVID-19 Asymptomatic Staff Screening Surveillance Testing Guideline, Vulnerable Staff during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Western Health PPE Guidance and Training: <https://coronavirus.wh.org.au/ppe/>