

# Student Clinical Placements and COVID-19 QRG

Updated 19 April 2022



Western Health

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

## 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.

Prior to attending an on-site placement at WH, all students must have received a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (booster); **OR** Provide proof of a medical exemption.

## Student Employment in Settings External to their Clinical Placement

Many students undertake part-time employment during their studies. Students are permitted to continue with external employment during their placement.

Students are required to monitor for potential workplace exposures, and follow Department of Health directives if their workplace is identified as an exposure site or if an individual they work with is identified as a positive case. We also highly recommend vigilant PPE usage and attention to hygiene practices (as practised in the health service).

## Movement between Sites

Students are permitted to move between sites during their placement; however this is subject to Departmental Manager approval. It is recommended that student movement is limited wherever possible. Student coordinators are strongly encouraged to plan placement experiences that encompass as many learning opportunities within the one site.

## Vulnerable Students

It is recommended that the Education Provider (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, the relevant Discipline student lead should refer to the [Vulnerable Staff during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) QRG or contact WH COVID Staff Enquiries for further advice.

## Illness

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

If students experience any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they are to not attend placement. Students should notify their nominated placement contact and seek appropriate testing.

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.

Students who undertake PCR testing are strongly encouraged to do so 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.

Students who undertaking rapid antigen testing (RAT) during their placement must report their test result to WH via <https://survey.wh.org.au/redcap/surveys/?s=XPJF39A8R>.

It is the student's responsibility to inform their 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.

### 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 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.

### **Contacts, Exposures and COVID-19 Positive Students**

The same guidelines, exemptions, testing requirements and precautions that apply to WH staff, also apply to WH students while on placement. Each Discipline will determine the most appropriate method for managing contacts, exposures and COVID positive students and ensuring compliance with WH guidelines. Students must inform their Discipline student lead of any social/educational/workplace contacts, household or household-like exposures or positive diagnoses during and in the 14 days prior to their placement. Each Discipline student lead will be responsible for informing the student of isolation, reporting and testing requirements, determining the process for return to placement and outlining any additional precautions required. The Discipline student lead may liaise with COVID Staff enquiries and/or RACDRs and Departmental Managers to support the decision making process. Students will be responsible for sourcing and accessing testing and reporting testing outcomes to WH and their relevant Discipline student lead and/or Manager.

### **Student Working Areas**

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, including third dose (booster)

- have been N95/P2 mask fit-tested prior to the commencement of their placement
- have/will receive training in correct donning/doffing of PPE (i.e. either prior to commencement of their placement or upon orientation).
- compliance with COVIDsafe principles within the workplace including:
  - QR code check-in processes
  - requirements to use designated site entry/exit points or specified breakrooms
  - physical distancing and density quotients
  - infection prevention and control practices, including hand hygiene.

## 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.

## 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. It is strongly recommended that outdoor break areas are utilised. Where students are required to adhere to additional precautions where they must not remove their masks in shared break areas, a suitable outdoor space away from other staff and students should be found for all meal and hydration breaks.

## 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 guidelines and protocols. This can be done by accessing the following link <https://survey.wh.org.au/redcap/surveys/?s=AFAFPP473D> or emailing [whscovidstaffclinicenquiries@wh.org.au](mailto:whscovidstaffclinicenquiries@wh.org.au).

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.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/help-and-support-for-healthcare-workers-covid-19>. 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, , Return to Work following Exposure or COVID Diagnosis, Furlough Staff Manager Exemption Checklist, Vulnerable Staff during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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