

Vulnerable Staff during the Covid-19 pandemic



Western Health

COVID - 19

Be Safe -- Be Smart -- Be Kind

Protecting vulnerable staff

Western Health (WH) continues to review and implement processes to ensure that staff members at a higher risk of serious illness during the Covid-19 pandemic are protected. The Department of Health and Human Services has advised that based on the limited current evidence, the following people are, or are likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they are infected with COVID-19:

- 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 pregnant

What should staff who think they might be vulnerable do?

Western Health staff who fit into these categories should discuss these guidelines with their line manager and contact the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk (whscovid-19staffclinicenquiries@wh.org.au) for further advice.

Why are pregnant staff considered part of the potentially vulnerable group?

It is expected that most pregnant women who develop COVID-19 will experience mild or moderate illness from which they will make a full recovery. However, evidence has emerged over the course of the pandemic that pregnant women are at increased risk of becoming severely unwell if they develop COVID-19 infection in comparison to the general population.

Pregnant women should practise physical distancing and adhere to standard and transmission-based precautions to reduce the risk of infection. Where possible, pregnant healthcare workers should be allocated patients and duties that have reduced exposure to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

Managers should assess the risks for each of their pregnant health care workers and implement the measures available to mitigate risk such as personal protective equipment and, in collaboration with People and Culture, consider alternative duties and patient allocation for staff members who are pregnant.

What do managers need to do if they think their employee might be a vulnerable staff member?

Managers who have employees who fit any of the categories listed above should encourage the employee to contact the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk (whscovid-19staffclinenquiries@wh.org.au) so that a screening process can be undertaken. Alternatively the manager may also contact the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk themselves to seek further advice.

What does the screening process involve?

A risk screening checklist has been developed called the 'Screening checklist for Vulnerable Staff Members at Risk during the Covid-19 Pandemic', found here [Vulnerable staff screening form](#). The checklist helps identify staff members who may be at higher risk of serious illness.

Who can complete the checklist?

- Individual staff can complete this checklist themselves
- Staff can complete this checklist with their managers (managers should not complete the checklist on behalf of staff without their knowledge)
- Staff can email the whscovid-19staffclinenquiries@wh.org.au email address and they will be contacted by the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk to complete the form with an operator

All checklists should be sent to the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk (whscovid-19staffclinenquiries@wh.org.au).

Checklists must be complete in order to be processed

What happens to the information recorded in the checklist?

Each completed checklist will be saved in a confidential drive accessible to the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk staff only.

If the checklist indicates that a staff member is part of an 'at risk group' the Covid-19 Staff Enquiries Helpdesk will send People and Culture a standardised email including only their name, location of work and contact information, and that they are part of an 'at risk' group.

What happens next?

For vulnerable staff who already work in a Low Risk area:

- Nothing may have to change with their current work.

For vulnerable staff who work in an area that is identified as High Risk (an area treating a confirmed case/cases of COVID-19):

- They may continue to work in their current role, but be offered the opportunity to be redeployed.

Any staff who are severely immunocompromised, regardless of vaccination status:

- They should discuss their suitability to undertake patient facing work with their manager.

Any staff who have a medical exemption to COVID-19 vaccines:

- They should discuss their suitability to undertake patient facing work with their manager. Options similar to those for vulnerable staff could be considered.

Managers should work with People and Culture and with the staff member to make a plan about how to keep safe at work.

Reference: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19>.