

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Student Clinical Placements

Guidance note as at 12 August 2020

Purpose

This Guidance Note provides specific advice to education providers, students, Victorian public health sector entities and aged care providers on student clinical placements scheduled during the current Stage 4 restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions in regional and rural Victoria.

This guidance applies to all students who undertake clinical placements within Victoria Health Services as part of their health course. The full list of disciplines is listed in Appendix A.

For general and up-to-date advice regarding the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), please visit the Department of Health and Human Services' website - www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus.

This guidance note can be read in conjunction with *Movement of healthcare workers and health service employees during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic factsheet* (<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/Movement-of-healthcare-workers-and-health-service-employees-during-the-coronavirus-COVID-19-pandemic-doc>) noting this factsheet is not specifically directed at students but provides some important measures that are applicable to both healthcare workers and students.

General recommendation on student clinical placements during the current Stage 4 and Stage 3 restrictions

Whilst clinical placements of health students are permitted to continue under the current restrictions, preference should be given to those placements that are critical for students to progress in their training and achieve graduation. This is to ensure there is not a detrimental flow-on effect on students being able to enter our critical healthcare workforce.

Learning that can be done remotely must still be conducted in this way.

Clinical placements that are for experiential or observation-based learning (i.e. those students in the early years of their courses) must be delayed wherever possible at this time in order to reduce risk to students and patients.

Student clinical placements *within* health services

Clinical placements of students in health services can continue *if* the student is based at a single campus/setting. During the current Stage 4 restrictions within metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions in rural and regional Victoria, students cannot rotate across multiple sites during a clinical placement. For example, if students are on a clinical placement at Eastern Health - Box Hill Hospital, they cannot be on placement at other campuses e.g. Maroondah Hospital or Angliss Hospital.

Students cannot undertake clinical placements in COVID wards (including emergency departments) at this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the health and education sectors and will continue to impact on student placements. Collaboration, flexibility and consideration of alternative arrangements and solutions is encouraged, and it is strongly recommended that cancellation fees be waived during this time.

Student clinical placements in aged care settings

There should be limited engagement between students and vulnerable patient cohorts; this includes aged care residents. Clinical placements of students in aged care facilities in Victoria should not continue at this time. Students must also not move between a health service and an aged care setting during the current Stage 4 and Stage 3 restrictions.

Testing for COVID-19 prior to clinical placements

Students are not required to be routinely tested for COVID-19 prior to commencing a new clinical placement at a health service.

If a student is undertaking a clinical placement within a facility that is experiencing an active outbreak, the student should be advised to follow the public health advice and health service advice about whether they need to go into quarantine or be tested for COVID-19.

Students must get tested **if they feel unwell** regardless if there is an outbreak at their health service. Students should be encouraged to be vigilant for symptoms and to report even the mildest symptoms to their supervisor. Students will need to self-isolate whilst waiting for their test results. Students will not be permitted to continue their clinical placements during this period.

Movement of students during the current Stage 4 and Stage 3 restrictions

From 6pm on Sunday 2 August, metropolitan Melbourne is under Stage 4 Restrictions. The definition of metropolitan Melbourne is based on the Planning and Environment Act 1987 which sets out the local government areas that form metropolitan Melbourne and does not include Mitchell Shire. Further information on which areas are subject to stage 4 restrictions can be found here <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/stage-4-restrictions-covid-19#metropolitan-melbourne--stage-4-restrictions> .

Student placements which require students to move between metropolitan Melbourne (stage 4 restricted area) and regional and rural areas (stage 3 restricted area) **are not permitted**. Students are not permitted to undertake clinical placements in a different restricted zone to where they may be employed or reside. Universities are requested to review all clinical placements where a student resides in a Stage 3 or 4 restricted area and is undertaking a clinical placement in an area which is subject to a different level of restriction. Universities will need to make arrangements to minimise the movement of students between restricted zones.

From 11:59pm Wednesday 5 August, all employers who require staff to attend a work site must issue a Permitted Worker permit to their employees. This applies to students who are undertaking clinical placements in a health service. Advice to education providers and health services on the issuing of Permitted Worker permits for students will be provided separately.

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 facility which is experiencing an active outbreak, the student may be advised to be tested and quarantine for 14 days. Students will not be permitted to undertake clinical placements during this period.

Note that permitted workplaces and employees now have specific obligations in relation to COVID-19 under the new Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions. Employers and employees must refer to these directions for full detail of the legal requirements on each (<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/permitted-worker-scheme-covid-19>).

Students who are employed are reminded that they have access to government financial support at this time. Victorian workers can apply for a \$300 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment that provides financial support while they self-isolate to wait for the results of a coronavirus (COVID-19) test. Victoria workers who test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or are a close contact of a confirmed case, may be eligible for the \$1500 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Worker Support Payment that provides financial support while quarantining at home as

instructed by the Department of Health and Human Services. Please refer to <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid-19-worker-support-payment> for further information.

Where a student is employed in a particular health service, education providers are requested to consider clinical placements within the same health service to reduce the movement of students across multiple sites.

Reducing risk during a placement

In addition to limiting student movements across and within health services, education providers, including health services and aged care providers, should implement the following to further reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on student clinical placements:

- Implement alternative ways of achieving learning objectives instead of face to face interactions with patients and residents wherever possible
- Minimise student exposure to aerosol inducing procedures
- Limit student face to face interaction with vulnerable groups
- Ensure students are adequately trained in the safe use of PPE and local infection prevention protocols. Education providers and health services are encouraged to establish processes to observe students whilst donning/doffing PPE to support students to familiarise themselves with local prevention protocols.
- Ensure students are properly orientated and briefed on area-specific infection prevention policies and procedures that relate to COVID-19
- Ensure students have adequate training in hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and not coming to placement when unwell
- Ensure students know who to report to if they develop any symptoms
- Ensure physical distancing, hand hygiene, and frequent cleaning and disinfection are supported in non-clinical as well as clinical areas where staff or students may congregate (e.g. lunch areas)
- Ensure students are encouraged to participate in telehealth or virtual consultation where possible to limit face to face contact with patients
- Ensure students are cohorted to limit the number of students who come into contact with a given patient.
- Ensure the number of students and staff in a patient's room complies with physical distancing recommendations and is kept to the absolute minimum to achieve proper care of the patient.
- Limit the number of people at handover and on ward rounds to the absolute minimum
- Preference the use of videoconferencing or other virtual means for meetings, assessments, performance reviews, where practicable.
- Ensure only healthcare workers and health service employees essential to the delivery of care are entering areas where patients with suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) are being cared for, and laboratory testing areas.

For more information on reducing the risk of COVID-19 in healthcare settings, see <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/physical-distancing-in-emergency-departments-and-urgent-care-centres-Coronavirus-COVID-19-24-July-2020-Word>.

Appendix 1

List of disciplines

1. Medicine (including undergraduate and postgraduate courses);
2. Nursing, including registered nursing and enrolled nursing and Initial Registration for Overseas Nurses (IRON);
3. Midwifery;
4. Paramedicine;
5. Art therapy;
6. Audiology;
7. Biomedical science;
8. Chiropractic;
9. Dentistry
10. Diagnostic imaging medical physics;
11. Dietetics and nutrition;
12. Exercise physiology;
13. Medical laboratory science;
14. Medical imaging;
15. Music therapy;
16. Nuclear medicine;
17. Occupational therapy;
18. Optometry;
19. Oral health (not dentistry);
20. Orthotics and prosthetics;
21. Orthoptics;
22. Osteopathy;
23. Pharmacy;
24. Physiotherapy;
25. Podiatry;
26. Prosthetics and orthotics;
27. Radiation oncology medical physics;
28. Radiation therapy;
29. Radiography;
30. Psychology;

31. Clinical-based Psychology;
32. Social work;
33. Sonography;
34. Speech pathology;
35. Speech therapy;
36. Health assistant (nursing);
37. Allied health assistant;
38. Individual support workers; and
39. Allied Health interns