

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services



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COVID ADVICE FOR VICTORIANS TO STAY WELL IN WINTER

The Victorian Government is providing Victorians with more advice on how they can protect themselves and their families this winter, with enhanced communications, community engagement and outreach, and support for business to keep customers and workers safe and their doors open.

The Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants, which are now dominant along the east coast of Australia, are expected to continue to cause increases in new cases, reinfections and hospital admissions – with a 53 per cent increase in the number of Victorians in hospital with COVID-19 over the last two weeks.

We are also seeing an increase in respiratory illnesses like cold and flu which, along with COVID-19, are putting additional pressure on hospitals and healthcare workers across the country.

In recognition of this next phase of the pandemic and as part of our plan to protect our healthcare system, sensible changes to pandemic orders and public health recommendations will come into place at 11:59pm tonight, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and ensure Victorians are aware of proactive steps they can take to look after themselves and each other.

A significant new investment will boost public health messaging and engagement efforts with the community to encourage third and fourth COVID-19 vaccination doses, flu vaccination, the benefits of wearing a mask and maximizing ventilation indoors. The *Stay Well in Winter* campaign will run across TV, radio, outdoor and digital channels.

Importantly, this investment will support community leaders and business to encourage the uptake of sensible, preventative actions to keep well this winter.

The Government is also announcing another round of its *Small Business Ventilation Grant Program* to help businesses invest in equipment that will keep their workers and customers safe in indoor settings.

In line with AHPPC advice, the period when someone is considered a recently confirmed case (and therefore exempt from testing and isolation/quarantine requirements) has been revised to four weeks, down from 12 weeks. This reflects the emerging evidence that new variants of COVID-19 can evade prior immunity gained from infection.

Positive cases are still required to isolate for seven days from the day they took their test but an additional reason to leave home has been added – to provide transport for a household member to obtain food, if essential. The infected person will need to remain in the car and wear a face covering at all times.

Mask wearing in indoor and crowded settings is strongly recommended to protect yourself and our most vulnerable Victorians through winter – but there will not be any changes to current face mask requirements with these new pandemic orders.

The Minister for Health is also requesting that employers consider working from home arrangements that are most appropriate for their workplace and employees based on individual requirements.

The Victorian Public Service will continue with its existing flexible work policy and employers will work with employees on any changes required based on their individual circumstances.

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The Government is investing billions to support the health system and healthcare workers during this difficult time, but it's more important than ever that Victorians take sensible and meaningful measures to protect themselves, loved ones and the health system.

All Victorians are encouraged to make sure they are up to date with vaccinations, wear a good quality face mask, try to maintain good ventilation indoors and get a test if feeling unwell with COVID-19 symptoms.

For more information about how to fight COVID-19 and stay well this winter visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"As we're seeing across the globe and around Australia, winter means more time inside where COVID-19 and the flu can spread. It also means our nurses, ambos and doctors have never worked harder, and we can't thank them enough."

"We are working with business and community leaders to ensure advice and information is provided to the wider community – to help all Victorians stay well this winter."

"Wearing a mask, getting up to date with your vaccinations and ensuring indoor areas are well ventilated are small but effective steps Victorians and businesses can take to manage their own COVID-19 risk this winter."