



## Advice regarding novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

as at 7 May 2020

### Advice is relevant to the following individuals:

- Permanent (full-time and part-time) employees
- Fixed term employees
- Casual Employees
- Volunteers
- Agency or Temp staff
- Ministry agents who receive a monthly stipend payment.

Information in this advice related to employees will also apply to ministry agents who are employed in a ministry location (ministry of pastor).

### What is COVID-19, its symptoms and how is it spread?

COVID-19 (or Coronavirus disease) is a highly infectious disease that can make humans and animals sick. COVID-19 can cause illness similar to the common cold (including aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, fever, fatigue, shortness of breath and dry cough) but can also cause very serious illness (sometimes fatal) in some people. Older people and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems and/or diabetes are more likely to develop serious illness.

Please be aware some patients who have been infected don't develop symptoms and don't feel unwell despite them being highly infectious.

COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- Direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or
- Touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

### Government advice regarding COVID-19

Individuals must follow the advice issued by the [Australian Government](#) and [Queensland Health](#) regarding COVID-19 isolation requirements, which is updated frequently. Currently, the Australian Government has banned international travel and non-essential domestic travel.

As of 22 April 2020, there are 6,645 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Australia, 1024 of them in Queensland. There have been 71 tragic deaths, six of them in Queensland.

### Self-quarantine requirements



The isolation requirements in relation to COVID-19 is changing rapidly and the latest information can be viewed through the [Fact sheet-novel coronavirus](#). There are additional healthcare and residential aged care worker self-quarantine requirements published by the government [Fact Sheet-novel coronavirus](#).

If an individual presents in the workplace or contacts his/her manager and meets the self-quarantine criteria, the individual will be directed to leave the workplace (or not return to the workplace) and undertake the self-quarantine in accordance with the government directions for [self-quarantine](#).

Queensland's Department of Communities are assisting those in self-quarantine with food, medication, financial services and advocacy. Individuals should email [CRBHardshipAssistance@communities.qld.gov.au](mailto:CRBHardshipAssistance@communities.qld.gov.au) to access this support.

## What happens to my ability to work if I have to self-quarantine?

For ministry agents in self-quarantine and who reside in a manse, additional measures will be required to prevent contact with members of the community or your placement who may arrive unannounced at the manse. This may include signage to indicate your unavailability to meet face to face and to call a nominated phone or mobile number.

Volunteers, agency and temp staff will not be directed to undertake duties during the self-quarantine period and therefore, no automatic payment for hours worked will be made.

## Can I take leave during a period of self-quarantine?

Normal leave conditions as per the [Synod office leave process](#) apply during a period of self-quarantine and any request for leave should be made to the line manager. A new Pandemic Leave policy has been approved from for Synod office employees and regular casual employees (a casual employee who is employed by an employer on a regular and systematic basis for several periods of employment or on a regular and systematic basis for an ongoing period of employment during a period of at least six months). This policy whilst approved, has yet to be activated and is at the discretion of the General-Secretary.

For employees other than casuals, leave includes:

1. Personal carers leave e.g. to care for an immediate family member;
2. Annual leave; and
3. Long service leave (if eligible).
4. Pandemic leave (if eligible)

For ministry agents, leave includes:

1. Annual leave; and
2. Long service leave (if eligible).

Casual employees are entitled to two days of unpaid personal carers leave. Pandemic leave can be requested by eligible regular casual employees.

Services Australia may provide a payment if a person is eligible. See their [website](#) for more information. The Commonwealth Government made a number of announcements on Sunday 22 March 2020 and [resources](#) to help explain these payments are available online.



## What if I contract COVID-19?

You must follow the directions of your health care practitioner and are not permitted to attend the workplace.

Individuals who contract COVID-19 have a virus and are deemed unwell for the purpose of their employment, ministry or volunteer role. We have great concern for staff safety and wellbeing, and it is important for any individual who contracts the virus to take the necessary time to focus on their treatment and recovery from the virus. An individual will also be deemed unwell during a period of testing for COVID-19.

Normal leave conditions as per the [Synod office leave process](#) and [ministry agent leave policy](#) apply during a period when an employee or ministry agent is unwell and cannot not undertake their duties.

For employees other than casuals, leave includes:

1. Personal carers leave; until exhausted (the requirement for a medical certificate after more than two days absence will not apply);
2. Annual leave if an application is made; until exhausted, and
3. Long service leave (if eligible) and if an application is made until exhausted.
4. Pandemic leave (if eligible) to a maximum of 10 days during the current COVID-19 pandemic following activation.

For a ministry agent, leave includes:

1. Continued payment of stipend, but the appointing body can make an application to the Sickness Accident and Assistance Plan if the ministry agent remains unwell for more than 14 days.
2. Annual leave if an application is made; until exhausted, and
3. Long service leave (if eligible) and if an application is made until exhausted

Services Australia may provide a payment if a person is eligible. See their [website](#) for more information. The Commonwealth Government made a number of announcements on Sunday 22 March 2020 and [resources](#) to help explain these payments are available online.

## Medical clearance certificate

If you have self-quarantined as above, or have contracted the COVID-19, you will be required to provide your manager with a written confirmation from a medical practitioner that you are not infected with the COVID-19 before returning to the workplace. A person not showing symptoms does not have to be tested, based on Queensland Health advice.

## Can I make a workers' compensation claim?

Workers' compensation generally covers illnesses or diseases that employees and ministry agents develop over time as a result of on-the-job exposure. It may be relatively easy to prove that work conditions caused traditional occupational diseases, where the medical link is well established and exposure away from work is rare. Proving the work connection can be more difficult when the illness is considered an "ordinary disease of life"—a condition that many people develop throughout their lives from various causes. That doesn't mean it's always impossible to get workers' compensation benefits if you contract COVID-19, but



you will need strong medical evidence that workplace exposure caused or contributed to the illness. The Queensland Synod will consider each case on its merit when responding to a workers' compensation application.

### **What happens if my workplace is shut down?**

A workplace may shut down if:

- If there has been a downturn in business that would prevent the workplace from operating
- An enforceable government order is issued.

We will contact you if it is likely that a workplace may need to shut down or if there are alternatives to a shut down that can be considered. It is important that we work together to ensure that the Synod office is in the best position to recover normal operations post COVID-19.

The Commonwealth Government has instigated a range of supports for individuals and households that may be adversely impacted by COVID-19, such as a shut down. See their [website](#) for more information.

The Synod office (excluding Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Trinity College Queensland and Raymont Residential College) will be closed as at close of business on Friday 27 March 2020 for staff safety and wellbeing. All staff will be working from home and we are confident that business continuity is assured.

### **What if a health authority requests private information about me from the Queensland Synod?**

The [Privacy Act](#) provides for disclosure of private information in certain circumstances. If individuals of the Synod office or a Synod office workplace is impacted by COVID-19, we will comply with any request from health authorities for private information such as contact details. It is critical that where there is a risk of exposure to COVID-19, individuals must be informed as quickly as possible.

### **I am concerned about COVID-19 and refuse to attend work**

During this time, as social distancing measures have been implemented it is acceptable for staff, where able and appropriate, to work from home. This can only be authorised at the discretion of your line manager and executive director.

Where a ministry agent refuses to attend the workplace, the Associate General Secretary will contact the ministry agent.

Given the nature of casual employment, a casual employee can make themselves unavailable for work and normal notifications requirements to the manager should be followed.

Similarly, volunteers and agency/temp staff can decide not to attend the workplace, but the latter should raise their concern with the agency/temp employer.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to refer to government advice (as outlined above) and anyone with concerns can call 13 HEALTH (13 432 584).

Also, all employees and ministry agents can contact our Employee Assistance Provider (ChangeFutures) on (07) 3857 0847 or [info@changeutures.com.au](mailto:info@changeutures.com.au).

### **Protecting yourself and others from the novel COVID-19**

COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person, usually when an infected person coughs or sneezes and releases small droplets from the nose or mouth which are either inhaled by others or land on objects and surfaces. Transmission may occur from contaminated surfaces, so it is important to frequently wash your hands using the correct [hand washing technique](#).

To protect yourself and others from infection practice good hand and respiratory hygiene including:



- cleaning hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs
- covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing
- avoiding contact with anyone who has symptoms such as fever, a cough, sore throat, fatigue, and shortness of breath
- staying home if you are unwell.

### **Should meetings be cancelled?**

As all Synod office employees are working remotely, all meetings involving staff should be held electronically.

The current advice is that a maximum of two people are allowed in a gathering inside or outside. The only exception to this is when an individual is with the members of their household.

### **Can I require a person to download or use the COVIDSafe App?**

On April 25, 2020, the Health Minister made a determination under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth), which sets out a range of restrictions to protect information collected by the app and to ensure use of the app is voluntary (Biosecurity Determination).

The Biosecurity Determination provides that a person must not require another person to:

- download COVIDSafe to a mobile telecommunications device;
- have COVIDSafe in operation on a mobile telecommunications device; or
- consent to uploading COVID app data from a mobile telecommunications device to the National COVIDSafe Data Store.

There are additional restrictions that relate to decisions taken because a person has not downloaded, or does not use the app. A person must not:

- refuse to enter into, or continue, a contract or arrangement with another person (including a contract of employment);
- take adverse action (within the meaning in the *Fair Work Act 2009*) against another person;
- refuse to allow another person to enter premises;
- refuse to allow another person to participate in an activity;
- refuse to receive goods or services from another person; or
- refuse to provide goods or services to another person,

The restrictions would prevent a company from unilaterally installing the app on company devices such as mobile phones.

There is nothing that would prevent an employer or congregation from an employee or another person or to download or use the app.

A person who contravenes a requirement in the Biosecurity Determination will commit an offence, punishable by a maximum penalty of imprisonment or penalties, or both.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
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## Further information

Queensland Health: [conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/838/novel-coronavirus](https://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/838/novel-coronavirus)

Australian Government: [health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert](https://health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)

Australian Government Treasury – Supporting individual and households: <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/household>

COVID-19 Queensland Synod webpage: <https://ucaqld.com.au/important/coronavirus-update/>

Pastoral letter from the President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Dr Deidre Palmer

Pastoral letter from the Moderator of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod, Rev David Baker

The checklists available below may help.

[Community and Faith-based Organisations Checklist](#)

[Home Office Self-Assessment Checklist](#)

[Individual and Family Checklist](#)

[Organisation Preventative Measures Review Checklist](#)

[Australian Government fact sheet – Environmental cleaning and disinfectant principles for COVID-19](#)

## Key contacts

Synod critical incidents: [\(07\) 3377 9706](tel:0733779706)

Synod office communications: [0437 368 744](tel:0437368744)

Synod workplace health and safety manager: [0439 136 171](tel:0439136171)

Employee Assistance Provider: (ChangeFutures) on [\(07\) 3857 0847](tel:0738570847)