

IR POLICY AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE



INTRODUCTION

In this week's edition we look at various COVID-19 related issues that may currently affect your business, including various and variable state government relief and rebate schemes that continue to be available to eligible businesses.

COVID-19 BOOSTER SHOTS

By now many workers have been double vaccinated for up to six months, or now 3 months in NSW, ACT and South Australia. This means that many workers are now able to undertake a booster shot as recommended by the Australian Department of Health. Booster doses are available, free of charge, to everyone 18 years and over who have had both doses of their primary course of a COVID-19 vaccine. Booster shots are not mandatory, however they are recommended to maintain immunity against COVID-19. Members should consider their position on requiring workers to undertake a COVID-19 booster shot, and any related promotion of the issue in the workplace.

VICTORIA CHANGES COVID-19 NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

From 14 January 2022, Victorian employers are no longer required to notify WorkSafe Victoria of a confirmed COVID-19 positive worker attending the workplace, unless the individual requires hospitalisation or dies as a result of contraction at the workplace. WorkSafe have advised that employers are nevertheless required to continue fulfilling all other workplace related health and safety related obligations. This includes the ongoing use of COVIDSafe Plans, the use of facemasks, and QR code check-in.

The Victorian Department of Health has updated its advice in relation to a person testing positive on a rapid antigen test ("RAT") and the requirement of that individual to notify the Department of their positive result. We provide a links to the reporting page on their website:

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/report>

As an employer, if an employee has tested positive and been in the workplace you may be contacted by the Department of Health over possible workplace contact and infection of other employees. We provide a link to the Departments guidance on this issue: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/case-workplace>

Additionally, employers are required to notify the department of Health where there have been 5 or more cases of COVID-19 in a workplace within a 7-day period. We provide a link to the Departments outbreak notification form if required: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covid-outbreak-notification-form>

VICTORIAN COMMERCIAL TENANCY RENT RELIEF SCHEME EXTENDED

The Victorian Government has announced the extension of this scheme until 15 March 2022. The Scheme is available to businesses with an annual aggregate turnover under \$50m that have suffered a decline in turnover of at least 30% due to COVID-19 due to fewer customers or lower demand. The Scheme is broadly based on the previous Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme that was introduced in 2020, with the objective of supporting tenants and landlords to negotiate in good faith to reach an

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agreement on rent relief in a timely manner. Further information, conditions and eligibility can be found at the following link: <https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/commercial-tenancy-relief-scheme>

VICTORIAN COVIDSAFE DEEP CLEANING REBATE STILL AVAILABLE

This Victorian government rebate scheme remains available to Victorian SME businesses (annual payroll of less than \$3m) to assist towards the cost of hiring professional cleaning services to undertake a 'deep clean' of premises. The rebate will cover up to 80% of the cleaning costs at each worksite, capped at a grant of \$10,000 (for a total cleaning cost of \$12,500). Further information, conditions and eligibility can be found at the following link: <https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/covid-safe-deep-cleaning-rebate>

QLD CRITICAL WORKER ISOLATION EXEMPTION

Further to last week's member advisory on critical worker COVID close contact isolation exemptions in Victoria and NSW, Queensland has implemented its version of the exemption. The QLD version of the exemption is only for commercial businesses that have a direct and critical role in the fresh food supply chain. Based on the current guidelines, and unlike NSW and Victoria, it is not clear that a QLD based business in our industry or a related worker is directly included within the scope of the current QLD sector exemptions. We have contacted the QLD government on this issue and been advised they will not currently be expanding the current list of industries.

The isolation exemption in QLD requires that a 'close contact' can only be considered a 'critically essential worker' so as to leave quarantine if they are asymptomatic, fully vaccinated, wear a facemask when indoors, physically distance from other workers where possible, along with adhering to any employer related workplace health and safety requirements.

If a QLD business identifies itself as part of the critical industry list, and is affected by a 'critical worker' isolation issue, that business is required to create a "Critical Worker List" and submit that list to the QLD Department of Development, Infrastructure Local Government and Planning. This list must include a rationale of each role and why it is considered as critically essential.

We provide the following link to a QLD government website with greater detail on this issue: <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/current-status/public-health-directions/confirmed-cases-and-close-contacts/critically-essential-worker-requirements>

QLD COVID-19 CLEANING REBATE STILL AVAILABLE

The QLD government rebate scheme entitles eligible businesses up to 80% of the professional cleaning cost is available, capped at \$10,000 per separate event where a business is identified as a site of potential COVID-19 transmission by Queensland Health. Small and medium sized businesses that have an annual payroll in Queensland of less than \$10 million can access a rebate. Further information, conditions and eligibility can be found at the following link: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/running-business/covid-19-restrictions/cleaning-rebate>

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SA BUSINESS HARDSHIP GRANT

On 31 December 2021, the South Australian government established the Business Hardship Grant to assist businesses impacted by health restrictions in place from 27 December 2021. Eligible businesses who have experienced a 50% or greater reduction in turnover will be provided with a once-off \$6,000 grant. A further grant of \$2,000 will be available for eligible businesses that operate from a commercial premise located in the Adelaide CBD. South Australian members can find further and greater particulars on this potential grant at the following link:

<https://www.treasury.sa.gov.au/Growing-South-Australia/COVID-19/december-2021/business-hardship-grant/guidelines> and eligible businesses can make an application via the RevenueSA website: <https://www.revenuesaonline.sa.gov.au/?a=e&m=sbg12&d=Application>

NSW SMALL BUSINESS REBATE

The NSW Government is continuing with its small business rebate scheme this year. Eligible businesses can claim up to \$2000 (up from \$1500) which can be used to pay council rates, road tolls for business travel and other costs. The rebate is provided in the form of a digital credit and drawn upon to pay eligible costs and fees. There are eligibility requirements which include having total Australian wages below the NSW Government payroll tax threshold of \$1.2m for 2020-2021.

Applications can be made via your businesses ServiceNSW account and we provide a link to further and greater details here: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/small-business-fees-and-charges-rebate>

CONTACT

Any Industrial Relations Member who has a related query should contact Charles Watson, GM – IR, Policy and Governance at The Real Media Collective via email charles@thermc.com.au or mobile:+61 428 568 032.

DISCLAIMER

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