

Monday 29 November 2021

Support for workers critical to keeping reopening workplaces safe

In the coming weeks and months as restrictions ease and borders come down COVID will circulate across the country we must ensure that workplaces are as safe as possible.

Providing proper income support and time off for workers who fall ill, need to get tested or need to isolate is the most sure-fire way to keep workplaces safe as they reopen, as workers who've been working from home start to return.

The ACTU's *Making Work COVID-Safe* report outlines the most effective ways of ensuring Australian workers are safe as the country moves beyond the pandemic and starts to re-enter workspaces.

Paid leave for workers who need to isolate or get tested is the most efficient method of making sure sick workers don't attend workplaces, and aren't forced to take time off work without pay.

COVID-safe practices like ventilation and social distancing, making rapid antigen testing available in workplaces and a properly funded healthcare system are also important in creating and maintaining healthy workplaces and ensuring that the community safe.

The union movement is calling on the Federal Government to make sure that workers have access to a straightforward paid isolation leave scheme, and that it is consistent across all jurisdictions.

Unions are also calling for a reintroduction of a meaningful, employer-connected wage subsidy scheme for workers and businesses that are affected directly or indirectly by restrictions and any future lockdowns.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

"It is a welcome change for some who've been cooped up at home that we are able to go back to our places of work, but this must be done cautiously and carefully. The risk of COVID-19 is real and we need to ensure that workplace understand and manage the risks to our health.

"Throughout the pandemic, workers have been forced to burn through leave in order to follow health restrictions. This is not only unfair but undermined compliance as workers were forced to choose between meeting their basic needs and following health restrictions. In the case of a third of the workforce in insecure work the absence of any paid leave had very real consequences.

"The Government needs to provide straightforward isolation pay and wage subsidy schemes, that will support business and those who work for them that need to take time off to get tested and isolate at home or are impacted by restrictions.

"We have fewer ICU beds in Australia than at the start of the pandemic. We need the Morrison Government to fund our healthcare system to ensure that we are ready for the expected rise in cases as states bring down borders."

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