

Thursday 13th January 2022

Unions condemn failure to provide Rapid Antigen Tests and call emergency meeting of all unions

The ACTU condemns in the strongest possible terms the Prime Minister's failure at National Cabinet to ensure Rapid Antigen Tests be made be free and accessible for all to protect worker and community safety and get the economy moving again.

The announcement today allowing more workers who are close contacts to attend work is not a solution to the current crisis. It increases risk; and could increase sickness in workplaces and across the community at a time health workers and hospitals are already overwhelmed.

It is now three days since the ACTU wrote to the Prime Minister offering to work together during this crisis and proposing four key urgent changes working people need. There has been no response.

The ACTU has called an emergency meeting of all union leaders for Monday to consider our response to the failure of the Federal Government to address the urgent needs of workers at this time of crisis.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"The ACTU understands that Australians are facing an increasing health and economic emergency.

The Federal Government's plan to open up, if there is one, has clearly failed our health systems, our economy and the essential national supply chains.

Today we have again seen the Prime Minister fail to outline a plan for free and accessible Rapid Antigen Tests as the key measure workers and the community need to keep themselves safe and to limit the spread of Omicron. This is a major concern for all workers.

Essential workers are being forced to put themselves in harm's way to keep food on the shelves, medicines in stock, the lights and water on and keep this country open for business.

If the Federal Government had listened to the calls of health experts, unions and businesses last year we would have had sufficient supply of Rapid Antigen Tests, and nobody would go to work when they have been in close contact with the Covid virus. They would stay home to keep themselves and others safe.

We are in this position because the Federal Government did not do their job and secure adequate supply of free Rapid Antigen Tests. Forcing more workers who are close contacts to go to work increases risk and will not limit the spread that is putting health workers and our hospitals under intolerable pressure.

If the Prime Minister will not act, and if our national government will not provide national leadership during this time of national crisis, then workers and their unions will.

Accordingly, the ACTU has called a crisis meeting of union leaders representing all workers to consider our response to the Prime Minister's regrettable failure of leadership, to ensure that Australia can get through the continuing pandemic without compromising the safety of workers and the Australian community."

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