

9 MARCH 2022

## FURLOUGH PERIOD for VERY HIGH COVID-19 case load has commenced

The Chief Health Officer has recently given directions to designate that a healthcare worker furlough period has commenced.

**This means that the very high level COVID-19 case load in the community has been upgraded to having a high impact on services.**

A thorough risk assessment / mitigation and the understanding of definitions of close contacts continues to be very important and should be practised. These were previously outlined.

It is important to note that, 'these directions do not compel a healthcare critical worker to attend work. They establish an alternate testing and isolation process for close contacts, so that health care critical workers can attend work in certain circumstances where they would otherwise be prohibited from doing so in order to maintain critical services.'

Dental services are designated as critical services and the workforce as healthcare critical workers. We are managed by the Department of Health, hence, based on the present available information we do not have to register for the healthcare critical worker exemption for furloughing.

## The testing and the working regime during a furlough period: Staff and Dentist

A healthcare worker undergoing a furlough period is an *asymptomatic close contact, but not a diagnosed person, who may leave their isolation premises solely for the purpose for attending work* in their isolation period.

### EMPLOYEES

The critical healthcare worker must receive confirmation from his or her employer to attend work during the furlough period and the healthcare worker has consented to attend work during this period. The employer must be satisfied that no other person who ordinarily performs that work is available to perform that role. This is to protect the health and safety of your workforce who are attending work during a healthcare worker furlough period (termed: critical worker mitigation assessment). The furlough period dates must be recorded.

### SELF-EMPLOYED

A healthcare critical worker, to whom the healthcare worker furlough period applies, could also be a self-employed dental practitioner and can self-assess to make this decision. The self-employed practitioner must be satisfied that no other person who ordinarily performs that work is available to perform that role. This is to protect the health and safety of your workforce who are attending work during a healthcare worker furlough period (termed: critical worker mitigation assessment). The furlough period dates must be recorded.

The following **testing regime** should be followed before a critical worker leaves their isolation premises to attend work, or upon arrival to work if they commute alone. This should be recorded by the employer/self-employed. Furthermore, particular PPE should be considered:

### ASYMPTOMATIC

Day 1	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 2	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 3	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 4	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 5	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 6	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 7	RAT -ve	Work in fit-tested N95/P2 respirator
Day 8	RAT -ve	Work in surgical masks as a minimum
Day 9		Work in surgical masks as a minimum
Day 10	RAT -ve	Work in surgical masks as a minimum
Day 11		Work in surgical masks as a minimum
Day 12	RAT -ve	Work in surgical masks as a minimum

Table 1: RA testing regime and PPE considerations

- During this period, you must remain vigilant for symptoms. If symptoms develop, follow guidance for close contacts who develop symptoms (Table 2).
- If a person receives a positive test, they become a diagnosed person with COVID-19 and they will not be able to leave their isolation premises. Guidance shown in (Section B)

**During a Furlough period, the following must be undertaken:**

- No shared break areas.
- Use reasonable endeavours to maintain a 1.5m distance from others in the workplace.
- Consider limiting work to a single site / area (avoid movement around clinic).
- Avoid work with vulnerable persons.
- Wear a surgical mask at all times when travelling to and from work.
- Continue to quarantine in the community (when outside of work) for a full 7 days until negative RAT on day 7 and no symptoms.

## If you are a close contact with symptoms:

**A. RETURN TO WORK IF ALL OF THE FOLLOWING APPLY:**

- Have completed 7-day isolation, (either from the date of symptom onset or date of exposure to case, whichever is later.)
- Have no symptoms, and;
- Have tested negative for COVID-19 based on the regime below:

	REGIME 1	REGIME 2
Day 1	PCR	RAT
Day 2		RAT
Day 6		
Day 7	RAT	RAT

Table 2

## If you become infected with COVID-19: with or without symptoms

**A. RETURN TO WORK IF ALL OF THE FOLLOWING APPLY:**

- Have completed the required isolation period of 7 days and
  - No symptoms
- Then:
- Leave isolation and wear a mask indoors and outdoors for 7 days.
  - No exit RAT required.

**B. IF SYMPTOMS AFTER 7 DAY ISOLATION**

- Remain in isolation.
- Or see a medical practitioner for a medical clearance.

**Irrespective of definitions, any person who experiences symptoms needs to present for testing immediately and isolate until the result is available.**