



**FIRE +
RESCUE**

COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

APRIL 2020

VERSION 03

EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

Q. I am a retained (on-call) firefighter and I am isolated from my primary employment, am I also isolated from FRNSW employment?

A. Yes.

Isolation means total isolation to protect others. You must self-isolate until your medical practitioner advises you of the tests results, or if you have not been tested, self-isolate until your symptoms subside. If any circumstances change i.e. hospitalisation or symptoms change, please contact your GP, supervisor and Health and Safety Branch by forwarding an email to coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au.

If you have travelled overseas, you must isolate for 14 days - see [Self-Isolation](#) NSW Health.

Q. I am over 70 and/or I have an existing health condition, as I am deemed 'at risk' category, what actions should I take?

A. As you may be aware, the Prime Minister has requested that particular care be taken by certain vulnerable people within our society. In a National Cabinet Statement released on 29 March 2020, the prime minister stated:

Advice for Senior Australians including those with existing health conditions

The care and wellbeing of senior Australians remains a priority in this uncertain time.

All Australians respect and value the contribution that older Australians make to our community.

*Coronavirus has more serious impacts on older Australians, **those over 70 years of age and Australians with existing health conditions or comorbidities.***

National Cabinet's strong advice is for self-isolation at home to the maximum extent practicable for Australians:

- **over 70 years of age;**
- **over 60 years of age who have existing health conditions or co-morbidities.**
- **indigenous Australians over the age of 50 who have existing health conditions or comorbidities.**

These groups should limit contact with others as much as possible when they travel outside.

If you fall within one of these categories, you should contact your manager urgently to identify whether you should self-isolate. FRNSW is strongly of the view that all employees should comply with the above advice. If you are required to self-isolate under this advice, and you are unable to be provided alternative duties to undertake from home, you will be eligible for special leave under [Premier and Cabinet Circular 2020-01](#)

Q. What leave applies in each situation?

A. SAM COVID-19 Leave table

FF's Situation	Special Paid COVID-19 Leave	Sick Leave	Sick Leave COVID-19	Personal Carers Leave	Personal Carers COVID-19 Leave
Return from overseas. 14 days mandatory self-isolation. (non-symptomatic)	X				
Direct contact with confirmed COVID-19 case. Self-isolation and non-symptomatic	X				
Cold/Flu like symptoms. <u>Not</u> confirmed COVID-19		X			
Cold/Flu like symptoms. Confirmed COVID-19			X The special leave doesn't cover illness with COVID-19		
Caring for sick relative. <u>Not</u> confirmed COVID-19				X	
Caring for sick relative. Confirmed COVID-19	X				

Q. What if I live interstate and need to get to work?

A. *NSW Cross-Border Commissioner issued a statement 27 March stating Qld, Tasmania, SA, WA and the NT have placed movement restrictions across state and territory borders, while NSW, Victoria and the ACT have not. To help you find the most up to date on restrictions and exemptions our office has published a website with links to the different state arrangements. You can find that website [here](#).*

States and territories have created exemptions for border residents and committed to the continued provision of services and freight operations and cross-border travel for workers in occupations delivering essential goods and services. Please email HR Helpdesk hr.payroll@fire.nsw.gov.au who can supply a letter from FRNSW regarding this.

Q. Can I work from a station closer to home to reduce the risk of exposure during travel in flights, trains and buses?

A. No.

If firefighters have particular individual concerns regarding this, they are to raise this with their Zone Commanders and special circumstances will be assessed on a case by case basis.

- Q. If a retained (on-call) firefighter contracts or is exposed to COVID-19 at an incident and has to self-isolate, what happens regarding their primary employment should they lose wages from self-isolation if they have no leave entitlements? Would this be covered by Workcover?**
- A.** *There are several insurance options which may be available depending on the circumstances. Please contact your Return to Work Advisor on 9265 2800 to discuss if you have experienced a loss of earnings or medical costs.*
- Q. Is there a plan addressing the workplace issues for permanent firefighters travelling long distances to stations which involve extended time away from family, especially when partner is also an essential service?**
- A.** *Staff need to raise potential travel issues with local command at first instance and consider arrangements. Local Command can then discuss with Operational Staffing and IR Team can also provide advice to Operational Staffing.*
- Q. At this stage we cannot routinely accommodate firefighters in alternative locations in the absence of a compelling reason. Our priority is providing emergency coverage and we need firefighters at their usual place of work at this time. We understand this is difficult for our staff who may live a distance from work, which is bound to cause inconvenience in some situations.**
- A.** *Firefighters still have access to all other leave entitlements as per the award and some may choose to exercise these if they feel they cannot travel to their usual work location. Again, FRNSW needs your commitment to work at your usual station at this time to ensure we can protect our communities.*
- Q. Are Firefighters who live intrastate and have flights cancelled, entitled to Special Leave?**
- A.** *No.*
- At this stage we cannot routinely accommodate firefighters in alternative locations in the absence of a compelling reason. Our priority is providing emergency coverage and we need firefighters at their usual place of work at this time. We understand this is difficult at the moment for our staff who may live a distance from work, which is bound to cause inconvenience in some situations.*
- Firefighters still have access to all other leave entitlements as per the award and some may choose to exercise these if they feel they cannot travel to their usual work location. Again, FRNSW needs your commitment to work at your usual station at this time to ensure we can protect our communities.*
- Q. In relation to firefighters who have family members who may be at a greater health risk of contracting COVID-19, can the firefighter access sick leave/personal carers**
- A.** *All general leave provisions remain in place. These matters must be raised with you manager for case by case consideration.*

Q. If a person's family member has been forced to self-isolate due to returning to Australia, is that family at greater risk and should they also stay away from work?

A. No.

If the person is not symptomatic, they are not deemed a risk. If you become symptomatic, then you should isolate, seek medical advice until testing or symptoms subside. See [NSW Health](#) guide

Q. If I choose to keep my kids at home from school/childcare, am I entitled to the 20 day special leave?

A. No.

Normal leave entitlements apply.

Q. Is there any clarification on the utilisation of the 20 days Special Leave as to whether it needs to be used consecutively or can be split to cover shift work?

A. Please note the first step is to determine whether you are eligible for special leave, as Circular 2020-01 is very specific regarding what leave is covered.

The process for determining what constitutes 1 day of special leave for a permanent firefighter will follow the NMC process. That is,

- *one 24 shift is 2 days of special leave.*
- *on other shift arrangements, 1 shift (whether 10 or 14hrs or other) is 1 day of special leave*
- *for day workers, 1 work day is 1 day of special leave.*

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q. When is the influenza vaccine available?

A. The [influenza](#) vaccine will be available April/May 2020. A schedule will be released early April. **Please note this does not provide immunity for COVID-19.** NSW Health stress the importance of having the influenza vaccine to avoid risk of co-infection with COVID-19 and to reduce the impact on the community and the health care system. Optimal vaccine protection against influenza occurs within the first 3 to 4 months following vaccination and the peak influenza season is between June – September and revaccination is not routinely recommended.

Q. I can't get into a GP – what supporting paperwork do I provide for sick leave. Is it OK to provide a Stat Dec (Non COVID-19)

A. You will need to email healthandsafety@fire.nsw.gov.au with dates and nature of illness/incapacity as per normal sick leave process. This will be reviewed case by case, dependant on sick leave time line and nature of illness/incapacity required to be submitted as per Clause 23.4 of the Crown Employees (FRNSW Permanent Firefighting Staff) Award 2017 and Clause 16.3 Crown Employees (FRNSW Retained Firefighting Staff) Award 2017. Please refer to the [Joint statement from FRNSW and FBEU](#) dated 18 March 2020.

Q. Will the Health Check programs continue during this pandemic?

A. As we continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic very closely we strongly recommend that you arrange your Health Check appointment for later this year. If you would like assistance in locating a suitable medical practitioner please contact the Independent Occupational Provider, Unified Healthcare Group (UHG), on 1800 376 485. Continuing this program where circumstances will allow is a large part of FRNSW's commitment to firefighter health and safety.

If you have any concerns please speak to your Command or contact the healthcheckcoordinator@fire.nsw.gov.au

Q. I have returned from overseas or interstate, do I need to isolate?

A. Yes.

As of Monday 16 March 2020, Australian Government has directed anyone who arrives from overseas, including cruise ships, must be isolated for 14 days, regardless of symptoms. This does not include interstate travel to get to work or return from work.

Q. Do I come to work if I have mild like 'flu-like' symptoms? (Cough and/or runny nose and/or fever and/or shortness of breath) but my GP says I don't need COVID-19 testing?

A. No.

You must stay at home if you are sick as per standard sick leave protocol. You can return to work when your symptoms have subsided

Q. I have been overseas, and/or been in contact with a suspect case of COVID-19 and I want to be tested /screened for COVID-19

A. Ring your GP, Health Direct 1800 022 222 or Public Health Unit 1300 066 055 for advice. Not everyone will be offered screening as testing kits and medical staff are limited as the community spread of the virus increases. There may be more testing facilities and types of testing coming but at this stage, not everyone will be tested. If you are symptomatic, regardless of the cause, please do not come to work.

Q. If I get tested for COVID-19, what do I need to send to FRNSW?

A. Please send the test results (Positive or Negative) to coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au and inform your Supervisor/Manager

Q. Do I have to have medical clearance before returning to work after being recommended for self-isolation?

A. No.

You do not need medical clearance (and/or FRNSW Occupational Physician clearance) to return to work after 14 days of isolation, regardless of whether you were tested positive or only a suspect case. If your GP suggests you not be tested and therefore not a suspect case, you can return to work when all your symptoms have subsided.

If you are tested and your results are negative, you can return to work after your symptoms subside. Your GP will not clear you and you will not be retested as the health system and staff do not have capacity.

All changes to your circumstances must be notified to your supervisor and forward an email Coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au with emphasis on This does not include interstate travel to get to work or return from work details of your isolation and any test results, positive or negative.

Q. I am a pregnant firefighter and have chosen to work 24 hour shifts at my fire station. Do I have to continue this due to COVID-19 risk of infection?

A No.

The World Health Organisation's current advice is that it is important that pregnant women take precautions to protect themselves against COVID-19, by avoiding crowded spaces, social distancing and reduction of sharing spaces with an unknown cohort.

Pregnant firefighters should contact their manager urgently to identify whether they should self-isolate. FRNSW is strongly of the view that all employees should comply with the above advice. If you are required to self-isolate under this advice, and you are unable to be provided alternative duties to undertake from home, you will be eligible for special leave under Premier and Cabinet Circular 2020-01. Please refer to [coronavirus toolkit](#).

Q. Can family members visit the station or other workplaces?

A No, under no circumstances

Q. Who should I contact if I become sick on or off duty?

A. In the first instance contact your supervisor and the Health and Safety Branch at coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au

Q. Are there more Safety Bulletins relating to COVID-19 coming out?

A. No.

The [coronavirus toolkit](#) on the intranet is one source of truth. All Safety Bulletins related to COVID-19 have been rescinded

Q. If I am isolated and/or I need assistance, what FRNSW support is available?

A. Wellbeing Coordinator and peer support: 02 9265 3910 or 0448 295 725

FRNSW Chaplain: 0418 869 280

Employee Assistance Program: 1300 360 364

Q. Why is my Fitness Room at the station open when the Government has closed all gyms?

A Health & Safety Branch have communicated with stakeholders to arrive at a decision to keep access to Station Fitness Rooms open, but with sufficient controls to manage and mitigate any risk as far as reasonably practicable. Both the physical and mental health of our workforce is paramount and keeping the Fitness Rooms open has been deemed as not posing any higher risk than that presented by other interactions occurring with your fellow firefighters, **if all** required controls are implemented.

This approach is consistent with what is occurring across other AFAC Member agencies.

Q. Our station has cakes of soap which are used by all staff- should we get rid of them?

A No.

Soap will assist reducing transmission of the virus. Please refer to the [COVID-19 NSW Health guidelines](#) and FRNSW's [Infection Prevention and Control Manual](#).

Q. Are station staff responsible for disinfecting it following a confirmed COVID-19 exposure at the station?

A Yes.

All staff at station should conduct the cleaning processes implemented by FRNSW and detailed on the coronavirus toolkit. This will include disinfecting guidelines for a confirmed case of COVID-19. Staff can use their highest level of protection afforded to them during this process if required. Regular cleaning must be conducted by crew as per normal rostered arrangements.

Q. Will the Fitness Drills program continue during the pandemic?

A. *No. As per Public Health (COVID-19) Restrictions on Gathering and Movement Order 2020 dated 30 March 2020 and FRNSW Directives to minimise COVID-19 exposure risk and only undertake activities essential to operational capability/response, Fitness Drills will not continue during the current pandemic.*

MISC

Q. Why are some staff and the leaders of our organisation still meeting together on a regular basis in the one room?

A. *To ensure FRNSW maintains its critical functions, along with ensuring processes are put in place to ensure the health and safety of our staff, various meetings need to transpire, which occur via various forms. When these meetings are face to face, social distancing guidelines and handwashing and respiratory etiquette are applied.*

Q. I am getting contractors coming into my station for routine checks and I am nervous of exposure. What contractors are permitted to enter the station?

A. *Contractors undertaking statutory inspections or urgent or essential maintenance and/or repairs to the building, equipment or appliances are permitted to enter the station. Social distancing and hand hygiene must be maintained, and work areas contacted by the contractor must be cleaned by the contractor prior to their departure.*

The following is list of statutory inspections that must be undertaken by contractors:

- *Testing and tagging of electrical equipment*
- *Hazardous substance (asbestos) inspections*
- *Roof anchor inspections*
- *Thermostatic mixing valve inspections*

- Water back flow protection device inspections
- Residual Current Device (RCD) inspections
- Air conditioning servicing and inspection
- Fire protection system inspections

Minor works and maintenance should only occur if the work area can be isolated from the station staff and following agreement between Zone Management, station staff and the contractor. Social distancing and hand hygiene must be maintained, and work areas contacted by the contractor must be cleaned by the contractor prior to their departure.

Q. Should all FRNSW appliances be cleaned after each use?

A. Yes, the interior of all vehicles should be cleaned as per the [SIMS](#) worksheet

Q. If a person develop flu-like' symptoms at work, can they be directed to leave?

A. Though you can't be 'directed', for the consideration of your co-workers and your community, staff are expected to take personal responsibility and follow your usual workplace policies and procedures re [Infection Prevention and Control](#) manual while at work.

Q. Is it safe for me to be at work while my partner is pregnant? If not, to what leave am I entitled?

A. Yes.

While ever you are adhering to FRNSW's recommended safe PPE and procedures appropriate to significantly reducing the risk of COVID-19. Normal leave entitlements apply.

Q. Are all first responders going to be screened for COVID-19?

A. No.

Please see [NSW Health guidelines](#). At present, NSW Health is recommending people with acute, cold, flu-like symptoms who are returned travellers, or a contact of a confirmed case, be tested for COVID-19.

Q. Are working 24 hr shifts increasing our risks to contact COVID-19?

A. No.

All staff should follow the NSW social distance guidelines where practicable during their work hours. Decision around staff changeovers, kitchen and recline areas need to be address by the station management teams

Q. Has the department decided that retained members should only have 2 persons in a truck to respond to calls and that 2 others should follow in private vehicles?

A. Please refer to the [On-call Retained Firefighters COVID-19 Operational Exposure Management](#) in the [coronavirus toolkit](#)

Q. Do I need to bag and tag my PPE after every AFA at a nursing home or Hospital?

A. No, if you have attended an AFA and **have not** been directly exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 and there were no firefighting operations undertaken then bagging and tagging would not be necessary

Q. Should we be using the Bag Valve Mask resuscitators and O2 Therapy to reduce the risk of transmission?

A. Yes.

Please refer to the [Australian Resuscitation Council statements on COVID-19](#)

Q. My station is short of COVID-19 type consumables. I have tried to order replacements on ESCAT but it states there is none available and won't let me back order them? What do I do?

A. Please refer to intranet story [ESCAT Items in Short Supply](#) for details on how to review availability and ordering critical consumables.

PPE should be selected as per [PPE Selection Guidance Fact Sheet](#).

The sharing of critical consumables between stations within commands has greatly reduced shortages across the agency, thank you.

The supply of critical consumable items is changing daily and regular reports are distributed to Managers.

Zone Commander should contact COVID19IMT@fire.nsw.gov.au when their Zone has exhausted stock.

Stations have the authority to purchase alternative consumables locally, like for like. If advice is required for the purchase of an alternate consumable please email COVID19IMT@fire.nsw.gov.au

Remember all consumables have an expiry date and ESCAT is the source of truth.