

# FAQ for E tū aged care workers

*Last updated 9 April 2020*

***As front-line healthcare staff, you are putting yourselves at risk to keep the most vulnerable in our communities supported and safe. We thank you for your work and together we can support each other to be safe and protect our rights at work. Here are some answers to the frequently asked questions that E tū is getting from aged care members.***

## **Am I an essential worker?**

Health is an essential service so work in aged care, disability, mental health services will continue. This includes care and support staff, cleaners, kitchen and laundry staff. You are all a key part of the frontline health work force and need to continue working so that our health system can keep working for us all. Not all staff in health are deemed essential, for example, some administration staff (who should be able to work from home) or gardening workers. [A full list of essential industries can be found at here.](#)

## **I work as a carer and I am in contact with elderly and vulnerable people. I'm concerned about passing on the virus to them or picking it up from clients, service users, or other staff. What should I do?**

If you're not showing symptoms of COVID-19 and haven't come into contact with anyone with COVID-19, you should continue to attend work as usual. PPE gear and washing your hands will be important to keep you safe at work.

It is very important that the care system continues to operate, including the crucial work that you do. However, if you experience symptoms, contact your doctor – you should remain at home and not attend work. If anyone in your household has symptoms, you need to self-isolate for 14 days.

## **When should I stay home?**

The Ministry of Health guidance is that you must stay home if:

- you have to care for a family member who has COVID-19
- you or a dependent have to self-isolate due to potential exposure to a known COVID-19 positive case
- you are over 70 (over 60 for Maori or Pasefika)
- you have an underlying health condition that makes you vulnerable to COVID-19
- someone in your household has an underlying health condition that makes them vulnerable to COVID-19

## **Will I be paid if I have to stay home?**

Yes, you should be paid.

## **What if my employer says they cannot afford to pay me?**

The Government has put in place a wages subsidy payment for essential service employers. Your employer can apply for this payment. They have to prove that they cannot afford to pay you your usual pay. Before they can apply, they have to discuss that application with you.

You do not have to agree to be paid less or take your leave.

**I want to wear a mask and full PPE (personal protective equipment) but the boss says no. What do I do?**

The clinical information is that masks are not an effective protection on their own and that prolonged use may be a problem. However, if it makes you feel safer, we would expect your employer to supply a mask and all other protective equipment. [The Ministry of Health guidelines on PPE can be found here.](#)

**If my employer doesn't have enough PPE (personal protective gear) do I have to do the care or task? What are my rights?**

You cannot be required to work if it is not safe for you to do so. Talk to your Health and Safety Representative or delegate and look at the Ministry of Health Guideline on PPE above.

**I've been told by my employer that we will have to stay in a care home or care setting for a period of days/weeks. Are they allowed to make us do that?**

No. It would be a violation of your employment rights to force you to stay in a work setting against your will. Workers may well need to work more flexibly during the period of the outbreak but forcing workers to stay at work for days/weeks is completely unacceptable.

If you are told by your employer to do this talk with one of your delegates.

**There are staff shortages where I work, but nothing is being done about it. What should I do?**

The coronavirus outbreak does raise the likelihood of staff shortages. Your employer needs to ensure workers are not asked to do an unrealistic amount of work. Talk with your Health and Safety Representative or delegate and let management know your concerns. Fill out and keep a copy of incident reports.

**Schools are closed and I don't have anyone to look after my kids. How can I get to work and make sure they are looked after?**

It is important that healthcare workers who can work do so that the health system can remain working. To support this, the Government has made funding available for childcare for essential services workers where the following options are not available:

- Working from home (unlikely for healthcare workers)
- Flexible working such as changed hours related to childcare
- Use of existing childcare options

[Options for accessing government funded childcare can be found here.](#) If no placements are available talk with your employer or delegate about other options.

**If the company wants to change my shifts or asks me to do different shifts. What are my rights, and can I say no?**

Your employment agreement sets out how your hours of work are set and changed including notice periods. Unless there is a provision in that agreement saying the boss can just change your hours without notice, they must either agree with you or go through a consultation process with you and your union and give reasonable notice. If this is happening talk to your delegate for advice.

You may also have a letter which stipulates your minimum guaranteed hours and the days, hours or pattern you have agreed to work.

**I had annual leave approved. Can my employer cancel it?**

No. You can offer to change your leave arrangements, but they must stick with what was agreed.

**I am scared that I will infect my family when I return home. While I am fit for work one of my family member's health is severely compromised and I am concerned that I will potentially infect them. What can I do?**

When coming to work:

- Bring only what you need to work
- Wear your own clothes and shoes to work

At work:

- Follow approved PPE and handwashing protocols
- Observe physical distancing wherever possible
- Store your bag in a staff area
- Have your own lunch and drink bottle
- Keep mobile phones in a zip lock bag
- Frequently wipe surfaces and equipment
- Change into work clothes at work

Going home:

- Leave your pen or other equipment at work
- Change into your own clothes
- Keep work clothes in a separate bag or leave at work for laundering
- Wipe your shoes or leave them at work
- Thoroughly wash hands and arms
- Shower (if in a high-risk area)

At home:

- Maintain physical distance to start with
- Put clothes straight into the washing machine
- Have a shower if you haven't already
- Change into new clothes
- Now you can interact with your family as normal

**If you are unsure or still have further question do not agree to or sign anything and contact your delegate or ring E tū Support on 0800 186 466.** There is more information at [www.etu.nz](http://www.etu.nz) or on E tū Facebook pages.

**Now more than ever is an important time to stand together and unite. Talk to your workmates about being union - together we are stronger and safer at work.**

To join online, go to [www.etu.nz](http://www.etu.nz) or ask workplace delegate.

*Please note the rules are changing often! This FAQ is correct as of 9 April 2020.*