

Monday 17 January 2022

Unions to demand new Covid safe plans from all employers, free RATs for community and will take action to ban unsafe work

Statement from today's ACTU Leadership meeting:

Leaders from national unions have today met to discuss the ongoing health and economic crisis caused by the rapid spread of Omicron.

Union leaders reported on the devastating impact the latest Covid wave is having on the health and incomes of working people.

All unions express their solidarity, respect, and deep gratitude to the health care workers of our country who are experiencing the full brunt of this wave of sick people.

The unions representing those workers report that they are exhausted and feel abandoned by governments who have encouraged "let it rip" policies.

The "let it rip" governments have failed to prepare our health system and our community, and they are responsible for Australia suffering the highest per capita infection rates in the world.

Australia is now experiencing our worst days since the start of the pandemic and the highest level of sickness ever seen in the workforce. Essential workers are being expected to put themselves in harm's way to keep the country going and in many cases without the protections they need.

The union movement will do everything we can to keep people safe and act to slow the spread of this latest wave of the Covid pandemic.

Unions condemn the failure of the Morrison Government to respond to our requests to work with us during this crisis; or our demands for the provision of free Rapid Antigen Tests, improved masks, fixing close contact definitions and restoring support for businesses and workers.

The Morrison Government has ignored repeated calls over the last 6 months from unions regarding the urgent need to procure RATs as an essential part of our Covid defence as well as the slow pace of the booster and children's rollout putting working people at increased risk.

We have determined that despite the Prime Minister not acting to keep working people safe, the union movement will.

Accordingly, the meeting today resolved to write to all employers reminding them of their obligation to do all that is reasonable and practical to keep workers safe.

This will require each workplace to undertake a new risk assessment for Omicron in consultation with unions, workers and their health and safety representatives. In addition, where appropriate, sector-specific plans should be developed in consultation with unions.

New measures are now needed to ensure safety at work.

For workplaces where working from home is not an option, the provision of free RATs by employers to all workers will be necessary once supply is resolved, alongside upgraded masks and improved ventilation.

Union members will take whatever steps are necessary in their workplaces to ensure they are as safe as possible.

Where employers do not fulfil their obligations, the union movement determines to do everything within its power to ensure the safety of workers and the community.

This may include ceasing work or banning unsafe practices.

Free RATs are needed for the whole community to limit the spread and keep people safe, not just essential workers.

The failure of the Federal Government to act and to provide free and accessible RATs puts us all in harm's way.

We are calling on the community to join us and demand the Federal Government reverse this decision.

The union movement will work directly with the community to demand all members of the Federal Government be held accountable for the inaction of the Prime Minister.

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