



## Huge change proposed for school staff and teacher vax mandates

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Victorian students to return to school without masks

Unvaccinated teachers and other education staff in all east coast states could soon return to work under new mandates being proposed on Friday.

Victoria and Queensland have both already dropped their requirements for teacher vaccinations to take effect from next week.

NSW is also considering the move to have the vaccine mandate lifted with the hopes it will encourage up to 1000 teachers to return to the classroom.

The plan from the Department of Education was proposed on Friday and would see unvaccinated teachers returning to schools from 18 July.

NSW Department of Education Secretary Georgina Harrison said moving into Term 3, parents could be assured of students' ongoing safety in schools and that face-to-face learning will be maintained.

A consultation process with unions and other stakeholders began in NSW on Friday and is hoped to be resolved within a fortnight.

The proposed changes would not apply to all schools, with staff in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) or support units and classes required to maintain up-to-date doses of Covid-19 vaccine, as will Assisted Travel Support Officers (ATSOs) and drivers.

"With more than 120,000 staff, 850,000 students and 2,300 work sites, it was important that as the Public Health Orders were lifted, we undertook an independent review of our Covid work, health and safety settings," Ms Harrison said.

A consultation process with unions and other stakeholders began in NSW on Friday and is hoped to be resolved within a fortnight. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Andrew Henshaw

"We have taken the time that was needed in coming to this position to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff and students would not be compromised.

It is hoped the changes could see an additional 965 "active" casual staff return to working at school sites, along with teaching staff who resigned or were terminated for not complying with vaccine mandates.

However, Ms Harrison said with an increase in sick leave in the first half of this year compared to the year before, the mandate removal would have little impact on the current staffing stress the sector was experiencing.

"Like all employers right now, we face unprecedented numbers of staff calling in sick due to Covid-19 and the flu," she said.

With higher rates of sick leave in the first six months of this year, the changes are not expected to ease staffing pressures in schools. Picture: Patrick T. FALLON / AFP

"In the first six months of this year (to June 20), there were 430,351 teacher sick days recorded, up 145,491 compared to the same period in 2019 (pre-pandemic) and up 100,324 compared to the same period last year."

In Queensland, the changed vaccine requirements to come into effect from June 30 apply to workers in schools, early childhood education, kindergartens and daycares, as well as prisons, youth detention, police watch houses and airports.

Queensland Health Minister Yvette D'Ath said moving forward decisions around mandatory vaccinations would be made by employers.

"As we move to the next stage of the pandemic ... we will be revoking our high-risk workers Covid-19 vaccine mandate," she said.

Ms Harrison said vaccinations remained a key pillar of the department's Covid response, alongside the supply of rapid antigen tests, enhanced cleaning and ventilation and encouraging unwell staff not to attend work.

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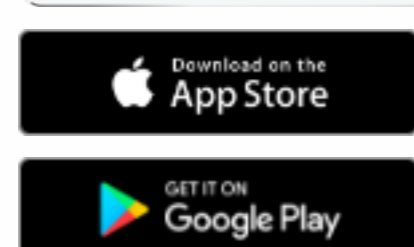
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