MEDIA RELEASE

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Mandatory vaccinations for health care workforce

AMA Queensland and the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation Queensland (ASMOFQ) have called for mandatory vaccinations for all workers in the health care system, with a survey finding Queensland doctors overwhelmingly support the move.

The online survey of AMA Queensland members, run in conjunction with ASMOFQ, found almost nine in 10 support mandatory vaccinations for all health care workers, and almost 80 per cent are concerned about working alongside unvaccinated workers.

Almost 97 per cent of respondents are already partially or fully vaccinated, and almost 90 per cent of those yet to be vaccinated plan to have the jab.

"Health care workers were prioritised in the first stages of the vaccine rollout and for good reasons," AMA Queensland President Professor Chris Perry said.

"Thousands were infected during Victoria's second wave last year and 70 per cent of those were infected at work.

"Just a few weeks ago, we had about 400 doctors and other health workers and their families in quarantine in South East Queensland during an outbreak.

"Everyone who works in the health system – doctors, nurses, allied health workers, cleaners, cooks and administration staff – is vital to providing safe patient care, and to keeping each other safe at work.

"We cannot continue to have a situation where people catch COVID in their workplace, or worry about taking it home to their families and loved ones.

"We support the federal AMA's call for public health orders to mandate vaccinations for health care workers, beginning in hospitals and then extending to the wider health system."

ASMOFQ President Dr Hau Tan said doctors have the highest vaccination rates in the state and are to be commended for leading by example.

"All health care workers who can be vaccinated, must be vaccinated. It doesn't matter if you're treating patients in the ICU or taking down their details at the front desk - you are at risk of contracting COVID-19, passing it on to others and becoming severely ill or even dying," Dr Tan said.

"Our health care workforce is absolutely essential and on the front line - we cannot leave them unprotected and unvaccinated. We've seen over recent months the disruptive effects that COVID-19 can have on the ability of health care workers to present for work.

"It doesn't take many health care workers either being sick or required to self-isolate for weeks, to wreak havoc on staffing levels within hospitals, and the capacity to provide adequate services to our patients.

"Mandatory vaccination, along with the supply of appropriate PPE and proper fit-testing, is an important part of a total suite of controls needed to minimise the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks throughout hospitals and the community.

"This Delta variant is different. With more than 1,000 daily cases in NSW, it is a matter of when we will see our next COVID-19 outbreak in Queensland, not if. We must make sure our hospitals and our workforce are fully prepared for this while our current case numbers remain low or at zero."

Dr Maria Boulton, the AMA Queensland Council of General Practice chair, said workers and employers alike need protection, both from COVID and from legal repercussions.

"Public health orders are a government responsibility. It should not be left up to individual employers to bear the responsibility for requiring their workers to be vaccinated, or for not ensuring that they are," Dr Boulton said.

"This is about the safety of health care workers and patients. It is up to governments to give employers and employees certainty through nationally consistent public health orders.

"It is complex and expensive for small employers like general practices and other private specialists to meet the legalities required to mandate vaccinations for their employees. We need clear guidelines from governments to protect every worker in our health system."

Prof Perry said while there was still a small degree of vaccination hesitancy in the community, international experience shows that the vaccines in use in Australia are safe and effective at preventing infection and severe illness.

"Everyone who can be vaccinated should be vaccinated to protect those who can't, including our children under the age of 12 for whom there is as yet no approved vaccine," Prof Perry said.

Background

- 417 members responded to the AMA Queensland-ASMOFQ Survey.
- 370 respondents (88.73 per cent) said they supported mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for all health care workers.
- 329 (79.28 per cent) said they had concerns about working alongside health care workers who are yet to be vaccinated.
- 403 (96.64 per cent) said they were either fully or partially vaccinated.
- Only 10 respondents said they did not intend to be vaccinated.

MEDIA CONTACT: 0419 735 641 – media@amaq.com.au