Keeping safe in the workplace during COVID-19

Mental Health Settings – Rural and Remote LHDs

The Health Worker Expert Panel reviews COVID-19 exposures in the workplace and has identified key lessons on COVID-19 exposures and risk. This week's focus is on keeping safe in a mental health setting, particularly in rural and remote local health districts. 45% of the health worker exposure cases reported in Mental Health settings were from an unknown patient or health worker testing positive. This includes both community settings and inpatient mental health units.

> **Case study**
> *A patient was admitted to a Mental Health unit from the Emergency Department. The patient was confused and had aerosol generating behaviours (shouting and spitting[1]). The patient's positive COVID-19 result was received two hours after admission to the ward. Health workers were wearing surgical masks and were within 1.5m of the patient while managing care.*

To reduce transmission between patients and health workers, consider the following:

- Do you have a plan to set up Red, Amber, Green risk zones with the required infection prevention and control strategies and the required personal protective equipment (PPE)?
- On admission is there a plan for where patients are located while waiting for COVID-19 test results?
- Have all staff completed education and competent in PPE donning and doffing procedures?
- How can your unit optimise recovery focussed and therapeutic socialising across consumers and staff whilst mitigating potential transmission risks?
- Have you fit tested P2/N95 respirators on category 1 and 2 staff and provided education on the importance of fit checking, and checking the mask seal every time?
- Have you established links with your Respiratory Protection Program Lead to get advice & support?
- Is there enough hand hygiene and PPE stock at hand and easily accessible? This includes gowns, P2/N95 respirators, face shields or goggles, surgical masks and gloves.
- Have you considered appropriate placement of hand sanitiser, and provided education on the importance of its use?
- In community clinics and on home visits:
  - Undertake a COVID-19 risk assessment prior to the home visit; take the time to ask questions and prompt the patient to consider their answers carefully.
  - Remain alert to COVID-19 symptoms during the visit noting if the patient or household members are showing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 e.g. coughing. Take immediate action to escalate when required.

Speak up for safety: support your team to do the right thing

1.   https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/communities-of-practice/Documents/mh-asbd-framework.pdf