

NSW Health Guidelines

Specialty Medical College Exams

Purpose

This document provides advice to specialist medical colleges on exams scheduled during the current NSW COVID outbreak and applies to all college exams until further notice.

Continuation of exams

NSW Health will continue to support college exams wherever possible throughout the pandemic response. However, colleges are requested to consider exam arrangements that, as far as practicable, minimise travel for candidates and examiners, and minimise contact between individuals. This includes minimising the use of non-inpatients to avoid them and their carers (where applicable) from travelling to a site unnecessarily. The response to the pandemic is evolving and may change at short notice. This document provides general advice. However, additional requirements may be necessary over the coming months as risk profiles change within the health system.

A NSW Health hospital or clinical facility (or a unit or ward of that facility) that is hosting an exam may be impacted at short notice by COVID, for example, through previous exposures or surges in the need for clinical care. A facility may need to cancel exams or make alternative arrangements at short notice to maintain safe service provision and/or to avoid risk to patients or exam participants. Colleges are advised to liaise with clinical facilities in the lead up to the exam. Colleges are strongly encouraged to plan for this contingency

Public health orders: travel to exams

Public Health orders place certain restrictions on movement. These can differ depending on where an individual resides. Currently, travel is permitted in order to attend medical college exams, if the exam cannot be done from a person's place of residence. However, permits to travel may be required in certain circumstances. Candidates should check the rules for permits at www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19.

Individuals are permitted to travel to exams from outside of Greater Sydney to Greater Sydney but must comply with public health orders while in Greater Sydney and after they have left. This means:

1. Must not stay in another person's home while in Greater Sydney
2. Must comply with stay at home requirements for 14 days after leaving Greater Sydney
3. If stayed overnight in Greater Sydney they must obtain a test before they are permitted into a workplace more than 50km outside Greater Sydney.
4. Must not carpool while in Greater Sydney.

It is undesirable for interstate travel to occur. However, it is recognised that some travel to and from the ACT may be necessary. Candidates and examiners travelling from the ACT to NSW should seek advice from the ACT government as to any restrictions that may apply to them leaving the ACT, or on their return to the ACT. It is noted that interstate travel may be restricted/cancelled at short notice.

Changes to public health orders may occur at short notice. Up to date information about movement restrictions may be found here: www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19.

COVID testing

Public Health orders impose some requirements regarding COVID-19 testing for people residing in certain areas of Greater Sydney. Candidates should be familiar with any restrictions that apply to the LGAs or suburbs in which they live, and abide by the relevant testing requirements.

In addition, all candidates, regardless of where they reside, should obtain a test and receive a negative result in the 48hrs prior to the exams. Rapid testing that can be done on the morning of the exam is available through private pathology providers and should be considered.

Changes to public health orders may occur at short notice. Up to date information about testing requirements may be found here: www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19.

Entry into NSW Health premises

In general, candidates and examiners may enter NSW hospitals both in and outside of Greater Sydney for the purposes of attending exams, subject to requirements of the local facility and restrictions in public health orders. General entry protocols regarding screening and check-in for NSW public health premises may be found here: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/screening-procedure-nsw-health-facilities.aspx>.

Each local health district or hospital may impose entry restrictions over and above those referred to above. Colleges are encouraged to liaise with sites in relation to any such restrictions.

College contingency planning

Colleges should have contingency plans in place to manage participants who may not be able to enter exams because they are affected by public health orders, or who do not pass screening requirements for entry into premises. Colleges should also have contingency plans for a health facility becoming unavailable to host examinations at short notice.

Requirements for both clinical and written exams: check-in, screening, COVID-safe plans

Check-in procedures for NSW public health facilities are outlined above (entry into NSW Health premises).

If exams are to be held in premises other than NSW Health facilities, there must be a designated person who is assigned to monitor and confirm the check-in of all participants. The check-in procedure must include a contactless electronic process (eg Service NSW QR code) and be supervised by a designated person. It is recommended that the check-in procedure meet the same requirements as those used in NSW Health facilities, which are outlined above.

Where colleges organise exams in a venue other than a NSW Health facility, the College should investigate details of that venue's COVID safety plan. Colleges should develop their own COVID safety

plan for exams where multiple candidates will be in close proximity to each other for an extended period, or where patients, carers and actors are involved. Advice on developing a COVID safety plan may be found here: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe>.

Requirements for written exams

The following requirements apply to written exams where more than one participant (candidate or examiner) is in the room during the exam.

1. Masks must be worn, except when eating or drinking.
2. For larger exams, staggered arrival times should be considered to allow for check-in processes and minimisation of number of participants in the room.
3. There must be adequate spacing between exam desks and during breaks to allow 4 square metres per person. The maximum number of persons permitted on the premises is one person per 4 square metres. Separation of candidates into a number of rooms (rather than a large number of candidates in one room) must be implemented. Records of seating arrangements must be kept.
4. Adequate hand hygiene stations must be available.
5. Tables must be cleaned and disinfected before and after use.

Requirements for clinical examinations

Remote clinical examination (without direct physical contact between candidates and patients/actors) is desirable and Colleges are encouraged to use remote clinical examination techniques where possible. Where it is necessary for direct physical contact between candidates, examiners and patients/actors, the following applies.

1. As far as practicable, candidates should be examined in the health facility that is their usual place of work. Colleges should consider reasonable steps to adjust exam procedures to allow: candidates to be examined at their usual place of work; candidates to be examined by an examiner employed at their usual place of work; use of remote examiners; patients to be existing inpatients at that place of work. Where this is not possible, movement of candidates and examiners between sites is to be minimised as far as possible. Colleges are encouraged to liaise with facilities about possible local mitigation strategies, such as creating “travel bubbles” between facilities.
2. As far as possible, hosting exams and exam preparations in areas where direct care is being provided to patients who are confirmed COVID-19 or high risk suspected COVID-19 is to be avoided.
3. Patients/actors participating in the exams must be screened and contact information for them collected. A record of which candidates and examiners interacted with the patients must be kept. Consent from patients/actors must be obtained to participate in the exam. The involvement of patients who need carers present at exams should be minimised but if used, their needs in respect of information regarding risks and exam procedures must be considered.
4. Participants must comply with all local screening and infection prevention and COVID-19 risk

reduction protocols of the health facility including, requirements for Personal Protective Equipment; hand hygiene protocols; and distancing where possible. Some college clinical exams take place in private facilities (such as convention centres, conference centres etc), and/or may involve candidates visiting multiple examination stations where there is contact with multiple patients/actors and examiners. If either of these circumstances apply, the College should seek advice from NSW Health about developing a COVID-safe plan for that exam which takes into account their particular arrangements, including matters such as Personal Protective equipment, hygiene measures, and distancing where possible. Advice on developing a COVID-safe plan may be obtained here: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe>.

Information for candidates

It is strongly recommended that Colleges develop procedures for informing candidates about arrangements pertaining to exams, and dealing with queries regarding travel, exam attendance, screening, and conditions under which exams will take place.

Questions and queries

Questions relating to exams from Colleges may be emailed to this address: MOH-COVIDcollegeexams@health.nsw.gov.au Please allow 3 days for a response (as well as allowing time for implementation of any advice provided). Individual candidates with questions about attending college exams will be referred to their respective college.