

# Advice to Medical Specialist Colleges

## Maintenance of examinations

### **EFFECTIVE: 02 SEPTEMBER 2021**

*This advice is subject to change at short notice, particularly in the event of unknown community transmission during a COVID-19 outbreak in Queensland.*

*Medical Specialist Colleges should undertake rigorous contingency planning to manage participants who may not be able to attend examinations or venues unable to host the examinations due to restrictions.*

### **Maintenance of College examinations during periods of increased restrictions**

The transmissibility of the Delta COVID-19 variant has necessitated the imposition of stricter restrictions during periods of increased risk in Queensland.

Queensland Health appreciates the complexity that such COVID-19 restrictions add to the coordination of Medical Specialist College examinations across multiple locations and recognise the importance of minimising disruption to Queensland's specialist pipeline.

While College **examinations may proceed during periods of lockdown or increased restrictions in Queensland**, this document outlines important considerations of which organisers and participants must be aware.

The following is intended as a guide for Medical Specialist Colleges and it is important to note that this advice is subject to change depending on epidemiological risk and advice from the Chief Health Officer at a given time.

### **Movement to attend an examination during lockdown**

With an increased epidemiological risk, reducing movement to the maximum extent is a priority in Queensland during periods of lockdown, with permitted purposes outlined in a *Restrictions for Locked Down Areas Direction*.

It is **highly likely** that candidates residing in a restricted area **will require an exemption** from COVID-19 lockdown restrictions to leave their residence to attend scheduled Medical Specialist College examinations. If granted, it is expected that this could be distributed through the College to eligible persons.

It is expected that invigilators/assessors/actors will be permitted to leave their residence without an exemption as it is to undertake work that cannot be reasonably performed from home.

Candidates residing in restricted local government areas (LGAs) **who obtain an exemption** would be permitted to leave their accommodation to attend a written or clinical examination in a locked down area but should remain in their accommodation at all other times, unless leaving for a permitted purpose.

Individuals from outside of the restricted LGAs **must not** travel to a locked down area for an examination.

N.B. The *Restrictions for Locked Down Areas Direction* is published upon the commencement of a lockdown period. For guidance, revoked and superseded public health directions can be viewed at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers/revoked>

### **Implication of border restrictions and attendance at examinations**

Individuals seeking to enter Queensland to attend a College examination continue to be subject to relevant border restriction and quarantine requirements depending on the status of the location from which they are seeking to enter.

Increased restrictions are in place for New South Wales border zone residents, with only very limited permitted reasons for crossing the border (limited to critical purposes). Medical Specialist Colleges should plan contingencies to ensure border zone residents **do not** need to enter Queensland to participate in an examination.

Further information about border restrictions, restricted areas, hospital entry directions and restrictions during lockdown periods are contained within the Queensland Chief Health Officer public health directions at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers>

### **Exceptions for attending examinations during lockdown or increased restrictions**

There will be circumstances in which individuals **cannot** attend examinations during lockdown or periods of increased restrictions. This includes:

- Anyone who is unwell at the time of the examination
- Anyone who has had known contact with a positive COVID-19 case
- Anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is not cleared
- Anyone who has been directed to quarantine, regardless whether they have been issued with a quarantine direction

Individuals who visit a high-risk exposure site either in Queensland or interstate (if the individual has been outside of Queensland in the 14 days prior to the exam) will be required to quarantine for 14 days, even if they receive a negative COVID-19 test result.

### **Implications for venues hosting examinations**

During a period of lockdown or increased restrictions, dedicated event facilities that host examinations (e.g. Clifton's Training Centres) are subject to the *Restrictions for Locked Down Areas Direction* or the *Restrictions for Impacted Areas Direction* (whichever is in effect at the time of the examination).

The last lockdown in Queensland was the strictest since the pandemic began and if similar restrictions are imposed for future lockdowns, it is likely that such event facilities will be identified as a restricted business and required to close.

The venue would be required to seek an exemption from the Chief Health Officer under the *Restrictions for Locked Down Areas Direction* to host the examinations.

Venues such as Clifton's Training Centres are also subject to the *Restrictions on Business Direction*, which prescribes mandatory requirements for facilities (e.g. occupant density) and there is no ability to grant exemption to these requirements for a restricted business. Medical Specialist Colleges should regularly communicate with the venue on arrangements for scheduled examinations, particularly regarding COVID Safe Plan preparation / adjustment and other related risk assessment processes.

The *Hospital Entry Direction* guides entry requirements for all Queensland hospitals and includes specific details regarding the management of entry to restricted hospitals. As with other venues, organisers should regularly liaise with Queensland Health facilities hosting examinations.

Recognising that circumstances may occur that limit capacity for Queensland Health facilities to conduct or host examinations (e.g. implementation of a full hospital lockdown), Colleges are strongly encouraged to undertake contingency planning to manage this risk.

### Minimum requirements for examinations

Ensuring the protection of all participants during the examination process must remain an imperative for organisers. The following measures are to be employed at a minimum during a lockdown, in the absence of specific public health directions mandating requirements.

- Anyone who is unwell **must not** attend the examinations
- Registration of all participants attendance via Check in Qld app (includes candidates, staff, examiners, patients/actors)
- Strict adherence to physical distancing before, during and after examinations and during any break times (this includes ensuring adequate spacing between desks for written examinations)
- Establishment of independent entry and exit points for participants
- Staggered arrival times to minimise number of participants checking in at once
- Utilisation of face masks and other personal protective equipment at all times, in accordance with the COVID Safe Plan / facility guidelines / public health direction
- Maintenance of good hand hygiene and other infection control measures, including disinfection of surfaces before and after use
- Requirement for COVID-19 testing for all participants (including candidates, staff, examiners, patients) if they have symptoms, or have been to any identified exposure site, even if asymptomatic (individuals must isolate until a negative result

is received and those deemed a close contact must complete a 14 day quarantine period, as advised by Queensland Health)

### Considerations for clinical examinations

For clinical examinations, Medical Specialist Colleges are encouraged to use remote clinical examination techniques where possible to limit direct physical contact between candidates and patients/actors.

In the event remote clinical examination is not possible, Colleges are requested to:

- Ensure candidates are examined in the facility that is their usual place of work by an examiner employed at their usual place of work and utilising existing inpatients at that facility;
- Ensure adherence to the *Hospital Entry Direction* to reduce COVID-19 risk;
- Avoid hosting exams in areas where direct care is being provided to patients who are confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19;
- Minimise the movement of candidates where appropriate;
- Maintain a record of interactions between candidates, examiners and patients (including the patient's consent to participate); and
- Develop a COVID Safe Plan where multiple candidates will be in close proximity for an extended period, or where patients, carers and actors are involved.

### COVID-19 Vaccination

Health practitioners have been prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination since the beginning of the rollout in February 2021. If not already vaccinated, individuals participating in examinations should register to be vaccinated immediately. The time between registration and being offered an appointment, particularly for priority groups, is very short.

It is likely that a condition of any exemption granted during a lockdown or other period of restriction would be for an individual to have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, or potentially a requirement for individuals to be fully vaccinated.

### Relevant information

Organisers should monitor current advice and latest updates regarding Queensland public health directions and liaise with local facilities, particularly restricted vulnerable facilities, to ensure they satisfy requirements at the time of the examinations.

Information about Queensland restrictions, contact tracing alerts and hotspot updates is available at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/current-status/urgent-covid-19-update>.

Information on Queensland Chief Health Officer public health directions is available at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers>

Information on the COVID-19 vaccination program, including registration and making a vaccination appointment is available at: <https://www.vaccinebookings.health.qld.gov.au/>

Additional testing and fever clinics and extended opening hours are mobilised during periods of increased risk. Details of locations can be found at:

<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/stay-informed/testing-and-fever-clinics>

I thank you for your ongoing collaboration to maintain the College examination processes while ensuring the protection of all Queenslanders from COVID-19.

Yours sincerely



Professor Keith McNeil  
**Chief Medical Officer and  
Acting Deputy Director-General, Prevention Division and  
Chief Clinical Information Officer  
Queensland Health**  
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