



Medical Specialist College Exams

COVID-19 Guidance for scheduled exams

Updated: 29 July 2021

OFFICIAL

Updates

Version/Date	Changes
29 July 2021	<p>This guidance is applicable to all medical specialist college exams.</p> <p>This guidance has been reviewed to ensure content is applicable to all risk rating levels and scenarios. New versions will be re-issued as required according to changes in public health policy.</p>

In the changing COVID-19 environment, content is often being updated. To ensure you are aware of the most recent changes, all content updates and the date the document was last updated will be highlighted in yellow text.

Purpose

This guidance provides specific advice to medical specialist colleges on examinations scheduled across Victoria in line with the COVID-19 risk ratings across Victoria. For further information on current risk ratings go to: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks>.

This guidance applies to all medical trainees who undertake medical specialist college examinations in Victoria as part of their training across health care settings.

For the most up to date advice regarding COVID-19, please visit the [Department of Health's \(the department\) coronavirus website](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus) <<http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with [Victorian health service guidance and response to COVID-19 risks](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks>>.

This guidance note can be read in conjunction with [Movement of healthcare workers and health service employees during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic factsheet](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/guidance-movement-workers-during-covid-19) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/guidance-movement-workers-during-covid-19>>.

General recommendation on medical specialist college exams across COVID-19 risk ratings

Medical specialist college examinations are permitted to continue under all risk ratings, with changes in guidance aligned to increasing risk profile.

Risk Rating		Corresponding guidance for medical specialist college exams
COVID Ready		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration should be given to avoiding trainees having to travel to areas where there is active community transmission to undertake their exams, where possible. • Any sites where exams are conducted should have a comprehensive COVID safe plan in place.
COVID Alert		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be examined in the state or territory where they are employed and movement minimised where possible. • Any sites where exams are conducted should have a comprehensive COVID safe plan in place. • Ensure physical distancing and that the COVIDSafe plan is adhered to before and after the examination.
COVID Active		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be examined in the state or territory where they are employed and where appropriate, movement should be minimised between hospital sites. • Any sites where exams are conducted should have a comprehensive COVID safe plan in place.
COVID Peak		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All those involved in the exam should undertake asymptomatic testing prior to the commencement of the examination. • Ensure additional staff are available to undertake the role of COVID Marshals before, during and after the examination.

Guidance

The Department of Health has been advised by specialist medical colleges that not all examinations are conducive to online or non face-to-face assessments given the need for tightly controlled exam conditions. To allow candidates to progress through their training, onsite medical specialist college examinations that require face-to-face or in-person examination can proceed with the following infection prevention and control measures (IPC) measures:

Testing

1. During **COVID Active (Red)** and **COVID Peak (Black)** all those involved in exams (written or clinical) should undertake asymptomatic testing prior to the commencement of the examination where possible. Examination participants (candidates, staff, examiners, patient actors etc.) undertaking asymptomatic testing prior to the exam are not required to isolate until a negative result provided they do not have symptoms and are not required to self-quarantine for another reason such as having been to a public exposure site, or been deemed a close contact of a confirmed case etc. Asymptomatic testing only applies if the candidate (or other participant) is participating in an examination at an examination site which is different to the health service where they are employed.
2. If an asymptomatic test result is still pending on the day of the examination or if the examination participant (candidate, staff member, examiner, patient actor etc.) has been unable to get an asymptomatic COVID-19 test prior to the exam date because of the short timeframe, they can still participate in the examination but must be able to complete the attestations below. Every effort should be made to be tested prior to the exam. No individual will be able to participate in an exam if they are awaiting a COVID-19 test result for a test done because they had symptoms.

3. Specialist medical college Directors of Training based within health services are encouraged to facilitate and expedite testing at hospitals where the candidate is employed.
4. The specialist medical college should remind candidates of the importance of adhering to physical distancing and infection control measures before and after exams (as well as during). Candidates should not congregate in venues outside of the examination facilities.
5. Ensure additional staff are available to undertake the role of COVID Marshals before and after the examination.
6. Note that for staff working in COVID streaming areas, a negative test result within the last 48 hours before working at another premises is required, in addition to at least 72 hours elapsing since the last shift.

Written examinations

Medical specialist colleges and/or examination providers should ensure the following:

1. Staggered arrival times for larger candidate groups to allow for check-in process of different zones separately.
2. All persons attending the examination (including candidates, invigilators/examiners) should complete an attestation at check-in. An attestation is confirmation that they:
 - are free from symptoms related to coronavirus (COVID-19)¹ and are not awaiting results from a COVID-19 test which was undertaken because they had symptoms
 - have not had contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the previous 14 days (except in the course of their duties while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment)
 - have not worked in a COVID streaming area at another hospital in the last 14 days, or if they have worked in a COVID streaming area at another hospital in the last 14 days, 72 hours has elapsed since the last shift and a negative test result has been received in the 48 hours prior to this attestation
 - are not currently required to self-isolate or self-quarantine in accordance with the *Diagnosed persons and Close Contacts Direction (No 16)*
 - have not attended any exposure site in Victoria. The updated list of exposure sites in Victoria can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/case-locations-and-outbreaks-covid-19>
 - have not worked in or volunteered at a hotel quarantine site and/or other port of entry in the last 14 days
 - have not been released from hotel quarantine in the last 14 days.
3. Candidates/examiners/invigilators and other support staff facilitating the examination process who fail the attestation/declaration are prohibited from entering the health service/examination centre.
4. Adjust candidate ID verification process to reduce physical contact.
5. Consider decals or 'witches hats' to ensure adequate spacing of candidates during check-in, breaks and departure. Physical distancing to be monitored by invigilators or COVID Marshals.
6. Ensure additional staff are available to undertake the role of COVID Marshals before and after the examination.
7. Zoning to separate larger cohorts into smaller groups with clear communication and documentation of candidates in each zone. Zoning should be maintained through breaks and include separate bathrooms.

¹Further information on the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19#what-are-the-symptoms-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

8. Electronic records should be kept of seating arrangements.
9. Exam conditions should ensure adequate spacing between exam desks and during breaks to allow 4sqm per person.
10. During **COVID Active (Red) and COVID Peak (Black)** a fitted face mask is required for all candidates and staff unless a lawful exception applies. Invigilators and marshals are required to monitor compliance with COVID Safe practices. Masks may only be removed during eating and drinking.
11. Each testing centre must have hand hygiene stations which include alcohol-based hand sanitisers and antibacterial wipes.
12. Tables must be cleaned and disinfected before and after use.
13. Examination venues external to health services should be reviewed to ensure adequate ventilation including functional HVAC systems, access to windows to allow for external air circulation. Ventilation plans should be part of the COVIDSafe plan.
14. Any invigilator or candidate who is unwell will not be permitted to enter the testing centre. If an invigilator or candidate develops symptoms during the examination, a separate space must be identified where they can be isolated to await transport.

Clinical examinations

Clinical examinations require close contact between candidates and both patients and staff. The requirements for written examinations are also applicable to clinical examinations, **including that movement of candidates is minimised where appropriate.**

Health services and other sites hosting the clinical examinations are required to put in place the following additional IPC measures:

1. Avoid 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 (SCOVID)².
2. Ensure adherence to the current Hospital Visitor Directions in place to reduce COVID-19 risk, including ensuring certain persons are excluded from attending (such as those with a temperature above 37.5 degrees, who are a confirmed case of COVID-19 or have had contact with a case in the previous 14 days etc). For more information see the most recent [Hospital Visitor Directions](#). Health services can implement additional controls as seen appropriate to reduce COVID-19 risk.
3. Health services must ensure that consent from patients to participate in the exam and/or exam preparation has been obtained.
4. Comply with all local infection prevention and COVID-19 risk reduction protocols whilst conducting the exam and exam preparation. This includes:
 - hand hygiene before and after each interaction with a patient
 - take reasonable steps to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from other persons (except those people with whom they ordinarily reside) where practical (i.e. when not examining a patient/actor). While density quotients don't need to be applied in clinical areas, hospitals hosting exams should still aim to

² A Confirmed COVID-19 patient has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) with a confirmed positive result from a pathology lab. A high-risk suspected coronavirus (High-Risk SCOVID) patient may or may not be exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 but have not tested positive for COVID-19. These patients have been admitted from a quarantine facility (or from a port of entry if transferred directly), from a coronavirus (COVID-19) hotspot location (who have been asked to self-isolate) or an identified close contact of a Confirmed COVID-19 patient.

keep people in examination rooms to a minimum to ensure distancing can be maintained. This also applies to demonstration sessions conducted in designated rooms or auditoriums

- Where hospitals are hosting a large number of candidates for examinations and/or exam preparation, they should consider conducting exams (and preparatory activities) over a number of days to avoid having groups of doctors within an enclosed space together for a prolonged period
 - Masks should be worn in all clinical areas in accordance with hospital Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines and the Chief Health Officer directions. Current guidance on use of PPE can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks-covid-active>.
5. Examination venues external to health services should be reviewed to ensure adequate ventilation including functional HVAC systems, access to windows to allow for external air circulation. Ventilation plans should be part of the COVIDSafe plan.
 6. Prior to each examination, trainees and invigilators/examiners are required to complete an attestation as per health service requirements (including QR code) to confirm that they:
 - are free from symptoms related to coronavirus (COVID-19)³ and are not awaiting results from a COVID-19 test which was undertaken because they had symptoms
 - have not had contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the previous 14 days (except in the course of their duties while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment)
 - **have not worked in a COVID streaming area at another hospital in the last 14 days, or if they have worked in a COVID streaming area at another hospital in the last 14 days, 72 hours has elapsed since the last shift and a negative test result has been received in the 48 hours prior to this attestation**
 - are not currently required to self-isolate or self-quarantine in accordance with the *Diagnosed persons and Close Contacts Direction (No 16)*
 - have not attended any exposure site in Victoria. The updated list of exposure sites in Victoria can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/case-locations-and-outbreaks-covid-19>
 - have not worked in or volunteered at a hotel quarantine site and/or other port of entry in the last 14 days
 - have not been released from hotel quarantine in the last 14 days.

All health services hosting clinical examinations should also refer to the Workplace Directions and the Workplace (Additional Industry Obligations) Directions.

Next steps

Please direct all queries relating to this guidance to <medicalworkforce@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

As Victoria's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic evolves, this advice may change to reflect the current public health advice.

For the most up-to-date information about Victoria's restriction levels, visit the [Victorian Government's coronavirus website](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-restrictions-roadmaps) <<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-restrictions-roadmaps>>.

³Further information on the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19#what-are-the-symptoms-of-coronavirus-covid-19nbsp>

To receive this document in another format phone 1300 651 160 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email Project Management Office Communications <COVID-19PMO-Communications@health.vic.gov.au>.

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Available at: [Department of Health: Health service planning covid-19](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-service-planning-covid-19) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-service-planning-covid-19>>