

INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEE



CHRISTMAS ISLAND



COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

11 August 2022

IOT COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

Changes to mask-wearing requirements and end of the IOT state of emergency

As we continue to adjust to living with COVID, from 13 August, the declared State of Emergency for Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands will no longer be in effect.

From 13 August, there will also be a scaling back of mask-wearing requirements. Masks will now only be required to be worn when on public transport and at the health services on CI and CKI.

These changes are based on the current COVID situation in the IOT and Australia.

The health advice is to continue wearing a mask any time you're out in public. Masks play an important role in minimising disease spread and are an easy and effective way to protect yourself when indoors or if you can't physically distance from others. While masks are no longer mandated, we encourage everyone to make their own decisions based on individual risk and safety.

This approach allows for the COVID-19 response in the IOT to transition from an emergency management focus to an ongoing public health response, supporting the health and wellbeing of the community moving forward.

These changes follow the end to the travel application process to enter the IOT which ceased on 11 August 2022.

Please continue to do your part and maintain a safe distance from others, practise good hand hygiene, wear a mask in public places, cover your coughs and sneezes, stay home if sick and get tested.

It's also more important than ever that people remain up-to-date with vaccinations. With the 4th booster shot now available to anyone over the age of 30, anyone eligible is strongly

encouraged to roll up their sleeves for their own protection and that of the most vulnerable in our community.

Please remember the risks of COVID-19 to the most vulnerable in our community – the elderly, the immunocompromised, those with chronic illnesses and those unable to be vaccinated – we need to continue to work together to keep everyone safe.

Anyone who is unwell with symptoms needs to stay home and notify the health service for assessment and further testing with a PCR as required, even if you have returned a negative RAT at home. A single negative RAT does not exclude COVID-19, particularly when you are experiencing symptoms. These include any cold and flu-like symptoms, nausea/vomiting/diarrhoea or loss of taste/smell.

Local COVID statistics are now issued weekly, consistent with the updates provided in other jurisdictions.

Close contacts and isolation requirements:

Close contacts who are asymptomatic will no longer be required to isolate for seven days. They must undertake daily rapid antigen testing for 7 days following their last exposure to a positive case and can continue attending work or school if they return a negative result. Masks must be worn and unnecessary outings or contact with high-risk locations and individuals should be avoided.

A close contact with any symptoms (including those with a negative RAT) needs to remain at home and contact the IOTHS to arrange PCR testing. Regardless of the PCR result they need to remain at home until symptoms pass.

High risk exposure location announcements have eased, to allow health care workers to focus their efforts on contacting cases and continuing the provision general of health care. This is not an indicator that there is less COVID-19 in the community. The health service will direct people for testing as required. Community members and visitors are asked to continue to self-monitor for symptoms, isolate and test if symptomatic. People are encouraged to maintain adequate stocks of RATs to ensure they are able to safely test if they become a close contact – these are available at numerous retail shops. The pharmacy also has free RATs available to pensioners and health care card holders. Please contact the IOTHS if you do not have access to a RAT.

If you are informed that you are a close contact – by either the health service or a confirmed positive case to whom you have been exposed – you need to follow the new guidelines.

The guidelines are available here:

[Microsoft Word - IOT Testing and Isolation Plan for Covid July 2022.docx
\(indianoceanterritories.com.au\)](#)

https://indianoceanterritories.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/IOT_Complete_Isolation_Pack_07-2022.pdf

If you're COVID-19 positive, you still must isolate for a week from the day you tested positive (day 0) and can leave isolation, if you have no symptoms on day 8. Should you have symptoms, you are required to stay in isolation and to contact the IOTHS to advise them. You are not advised to conduct a RAT or PCR testing for COVID clearance. Clearance is based on COVID-19 symptoms being resolved.

COVID re-infection period now four weeks

The COVID-19 reinfection period is now four weeks, following advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

Previously, COVID-19 reinfection cases were defined as occurring more than 12 weeks following recovery from COVID-19. Given the detection and spread of new COVID sub-variants in WA and across Australia, this period has been shortened to only four weeks after recovery, consistent with the national protocols and expert medical advice.

People are now required to re-test for COVID-19 if they experience symptoms 28 days after they have been cleared of a COVID-19 infection. Positive results will be reported and managed as new cases.

This means that if you have had COVID-19, you should get tested and isolate if you have symptoms more than four weeks after recovering.

These updated guidelines also apply to close contacts. This means that you can now be declared a close contact four weeks after recovering.

If you are a close contact with no symptoms, you will not be required to complete seven days of isolation, provided you meet specific requirements.

Local winter booster vaccination program:

A fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is now available for all people over the age of 30.

Winter booster vaccinations are recommended for anyone aged 50 and over. They are also available and encouraged to those aged 30-49 to further maintain their immunity.

The winter booster dose can be given three months after the person has received their third dose, or three months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection, if the infection has occurred since the person's third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

This is to optimise vaccine protection. The gap between infection and vaccination is likely to lead to a better immune response and result in longer protection from reinfection. The next scheduled dose of COVID-19 vaccine should be given as soon as possible after 3 months. You should still have all the recommended doses for your age and health needs.