

AIOH Supports the Australian Society of Anaesthetists in their efforts for a safer workplace



As Occupational Hygienists, Covid-19 has presented us with numerous challenges, one of which is how we continue to protect the health of workers. Many of our members are busy helping businesses respond to and manage COVID-19 as workplaces continue to operate or begin to re-open, while others continue to effectively manage other workplace hazards.

Health care workers are recognised as a work group at highest risk of COVID-19 infection. At present there are proportionally more health care workers with COVID-19 than in the general population, approximately at a multiple of two to three. Failure to effectively protect our frontline health care workers not only places their immediate lives at risk but can also lead to another pathway of infection back into the community.

Over the past few weeks, the AIOH has been supporting the Australian Society of Anaesthetists (ASA) with their call for better protections and assurances across all Victorian hospitals to protect health care workers. It was clear to us that this was an area that was in need of support with good occupational hygiene advice, particularly in relation to aerosol transmission and key aspects of respiratory protection. This resulted in the ASA formally writing to the Minister for Health in Victoria and calling for several items last week, some of which are summarised below.

- Health and safety standard protection for healthcare workers in Victoria to be brought up to the same or better protections as are in place in other industries in Australia,

- An immediate risk assessment of hospitals to be conducted by health & safety specialists including occupational hygienists, in consultation with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and employees on the risk assessment and proposed control measures,
- Safety principles of redundancy and duplication be employed, recognising that human behaviour will cause lapses that are predictable in any system,
- An action plan for implementation of the control measures in the risk assessment,
- Follow up independent audit and inspection to determine whether this is being performed, and
- in keeping with consumer led and open disclosure principles, mandatory reporting of health worker infections with independent adjudication by a panel comprising representatives from national and jurisdictional work health and safety bodies along with health workers themselves.

In addition, the ASA called for P2/N95 respirators when interacting with known or suspected COVID-19 cases along with the need for training in respirator use and respirator fit testing.

To further support the ASA, we reached out and sought feedback and support from our allied partners in health and safety and indoor air quality, resulting in the letter also being endorsed by the Australian Institute of Health and Safety and the Indoor Air Quality Association of Australia.

Since releasing the letter, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services have updated their [Guidance on the use of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) for health workers](#) to now include the provision of P2/N95 respirators as per the ASA's request, which is a great result.

While much still needs to be done in this space, I wanted to communicate to our members the work that we have been doing behind the scenes to support health care professionals with good sound advice in this challenging time.

Sincerely



Andrew Orfanos
President, AIOH