

Tuesday, 5 May 2020

Pandemic leave, WHS reforms needed before workers can return

As states and the federal government start to consider relaxing isolation measures which have been controlling the spread of COVID-19, it is essential that the following reforms be made to keep people safe as they return to work.

1. Paid pandemic leave for all workers who have reason to believe that they might have contracted COVID-19. This would allow all workers who believe they may have the illness to get tested and if necessary, take additional time to recover. This entitlement can be provided for 90 per cent of workers by the Morrison Government, but states and territories will be essential to ensuring universal coverage.
2. A legal obligation on employers to protect their workers and their customers by implementing the highest practical standards and controls for their work, such as physical distancing, to prevent workers from being infected and stop the virus from spreading. This will require new regulation from state, territory and federal governments.
3. Compulsory notification to local health authorities and work health and safety regulators in all states and territories of any cases of COVID-19 infection that may have been the result of work.

These reforms must be legislated before any relaxation of isolation orders in order to keep working people and the community at large safe from a second peak.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“Workers and the public need to be kept safe should our economy reopen. This means implementing such measures as physical distancing and ensuring workers are supported to get tested if they have symptoms, supported to stay at home if they have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 and supported to stay at home or in medical care if they contact the virus.

“This is essential to protect workers’ health and to avoid a second wave of infections. 1 in 3 workers have no access to paid sick leave. Health authorities, including the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) have regularly cited the lack of paid sick leave as an unacceptable risk that will see more people infected with COVID-19.

“Creating an obligation for employers to implement the best possible methods of prevention, protection and cleaning, and also to report cases in their workplaces to state health and safety

regulators are common-sense reforms which will keep working people safe and help prevent the spread of the virus.”

ENDS

Contact: Peter Green 0400 764 200 or 03 9664 7266