

Thursday, 9 July 2020

New pandemic protections for workers urgently needed

Following the surge in cases, new lockdowns and border closures, the ACTU is calling on the Morrison Government to urgently provide paid pandemic leave at the full rate of pay for everyone who needs testing or must quarantine – no matter how many times this may happen.

To control and live with this virus we need to ensure that all working people feel 100 per cent supported to isolate and stay at home when they need to. It is clear that workers need new protections from being dismissed from employment if they are required to self-isolate.

The evidence is mounting from overseas and now in Australia that vulnerable workers without sick leave and who fear losing their job can't afford to take the actions needed to prevent further spread of the virus. They avoid getting tested and being quarantined.

Australian workers feeling symptoms need to get tested, stay home and help stop the spread, and paid pandemic leave is vital if we want to make this happen.

In Australia we can fix this, but we need action now.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“It is clear our country must do much more to contain and live with the coronavirus. What we have done so far is not enough and has exposed the holes in our defences.

“All workers need to know they will receive 100 per cent of their wage while waiting for results and while in quarantine. If we do not urgently adopt this approach, insecure low paid workers are more likely to avoid testing because they are scared of losing their job and being left with nothing.

“We also need strong laws to prohibit employers from sacking any worker in quarantine. People who are quarantining should be supported and acknowledged for saving lives and jobs by making this sacrifice.

“We may be living with this pandemic for a long time. This means we need to change our attitudes and temporarily change our laws. The Federal Government should fund this program, it will be the most cost-effective measure they can take to save our economy.

“Paid pandemic leave costs are a drop in the ocean compared to ongoing lockdowns.”

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