

# **COVID UPDATE CONSULTATION**

## **ON COLES VACCINATION REQUIREMENT**

This is an important update for SDA members. Coles announced three weeks ago that Coles' workers in NSW will be required to have had one dose of a covid vaccine by Friday 5 November and two doses of a covid vaccine by Friday 17 December to be allowed to keep working in store.

The SDA met with Coles yesterday for further consultation on this important issue and to ensure that no one's job would be at risk tomorrow Friday 5 November. Coles confirmed to the SDA no one's job is at risk tomorrow.

### **Member safety first priority**

The SDA's priority throughout the pandemic has been the health and safety of SDA members – you must be protected from the threat of COVID-19 exposure at work.

The SDA understands a significant majority of members have already received one or two doses of the vaccine.

We understand that 95.1% of Coles members across NSW & ACT have confirmed that they have had one or two doses of a Covid vaccine or are booked to do so.

### **Update on consultation with Coles on vaccine requirement and other measures**

We acknowledge that a significant majority of members affected by this have already had one or two vaccine doses.

The SDA met again with Coles yesterday.

The focus of the consultation today was how we keep all SDA members at Coles safe and how do we keep all members employed.

Coles confirmed to the SDA that no employees will have their employment terminated tomorrow Friday 5 November because of their vaccination status. However if a team member has not had any dose of a covid vaccination, or has a medical contraindication form, they will not be able to work until they do have one.

Coles has committed to work through with each member who is not yet vaccinated (currently 2.4% of team members) or has not provided an update on their status (currently 2.6% of team members) as to what each member intends to do. This includes in the short term what leave is available to any members who need it.

Coles has been directly contacting team members who either are not yet vaccinated or have not provided an update on their status. To have some consistency in approach to this the contact will come from local Coles HR people rather than from each store management team.

The SDA pressed with Coles the importance to have a range of measures to keep all members protected from the threat of COVID-19 exposure at work.

From the SDA's perspective keeping members safe from the threat of COVID-19 exposure at work is our priority.

We think this includes the need to further discuss the role for rapid antigen testing in situations where a worker has not yet been vaccinated as a means of preventing them from working with covid. Rapid antigen testing is no longer required to be administered by a medical professional which may make it more accessible. Whilst Coles has not yet agreed to this they have agreed to have joint discussions with Coles, the SDA and NSW Health on the possible role for rapid antigen testing.

The SDA will have further consultation with Coles on this.

## **What happens if I have not yet had a covid vaccination by Friday 5 November?**

Members on leave do not have to have had their vaccine until they are due to return to work.

Whilst the SDA believes there is a role for rapid antigen testing in situations where a worker has not yet been vaccinated as a means of preventing them from working in store with covid, Coles has not yet agreed to this. There will be ongoing discussions about this but at this point in time if a team member has not had at least one vaccine dose by 5 November they will be unable to work in store until they have had at least one dose.

- (i) **I have a Covid Medical Contraindication to the vaccine.** A small number of people may be exempt from having a covid vaccine because they have either a temporary or permanent medical contraindication to all three of the currently approved vaccines. This can include on a temporary basis people who have had covid in the last 6 months. If you qualify for these very limited exemptions you will be able to continue working if you can provide a Medical Contraindication Form from a medical practitioner.
- (ii) **I have booked for a vaccine appointment but it is not until after 5 November.** Coles will work with members to see if it is possible to get an earlier booking. If that is not possible Coles will work with you to have the necessary leave, paid or unpaid

depending on your situation, until you have had your first vaccine dose and can return to work.

- (iii) **I want to have a vaccine but am having difficulty in getting a booking locally.** Coles will work with members to see if it is possible to get an earlier booking. The supply of vaccine has improved so this may be possible to do. If that is not possible Coles will work with you to have the necessary leave, paid or unpaid depending on your situation, until you have had your first vaccine dose and can return to work.
- (iv) **I want to wait to have Novavax.** Novavax is not yet approved for use in Australia. An application for approval has been made with the TGA but it is unclear as to when or if it will be approved. If you are wanting to wait until Novavax is available Coles will not be able to allow you to work until you have had at least one dose of Novavax. Coles will work with you and provide you with leave, paid or unpaid depending on your situation, until it is available. If the Novavax application for approval is rejected further discussions will be needed.
- (v) **I don't want to have a Covid vaccine.** Coles will discuss with you why you don't want to have a vaccine to see if there is any additional information they can provide to you about having a vaccine. You will not be able to work in store whilst unvaccinated. You will have to take accrued paid leave. Once that is used Coles may allow a period of unpaid leave but that will be subject to their agreement.
- (vi) **I didn't want to have a vaccine, so I have had to take leave but now I have changed my mind.** If you were not vaccinated on 5 November and as a result have had to take leave, but you have changed your mind and will get vaccinated, you should let your store know. As soon as you have had a vaccine dose they will work with you to get you back to work as soon as possible.

### **Members not yet vaccinated should consult their Doctor**

The SDA strongly encourages any members affected by Coles' decision who have not yet had a vaccine dose to consult your Doctor if you have any medical questions.

**Members who want to book a vaccine appointment can do so here:**

<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/?lang=en>

If you believe you have a medical reason to not have a vaccination you must consult your Doctor. Only a medical practitioner (such as your doctor) can give you a **medical contraindication certificate** [form approved by the NSW Chief Health Officer](#).

## **Thank you for serving your community**

I would like to again thank all of our essential members for your work in keeping our community supplied with essential goods.

We know this is a very stressful time for all members as it is for all of the community.

The SDA's priority throughout the pandemic remains the health and safety of SDA members – you must be protected from the threat of COVID-19 exposure at work.

It is important to remember at this time that you are essential workers who are entitled to respect. Some customers may be nervous or frustrated but they have no right to take it out on you. No one deserves a serve. There must be zero tolerance for poor customer behaviour. Please report any incidents of customer abuse immediately.

Thank you again for your essential work.

***Barbara Nebart***

**BRANCH SECRETARY**