

14 January 2022

**CRITICAL WORKER ISOLATION EXEMPTIONS WELCOMED**

The region's peak business organisation, Business Illawarra, has welcomed today's public health update from the NSW Government that allows workers who may be close contacts of someone with COVID-19 to return to critical industry jobs without having to isolate for seven days.

These workers can only return to work if they have no symptoms of COVID-19 and they comply with risk management strategies including wearing masks and producing negative rapid antigen tests daily.

"The rapid spread of the Omicron variant has created chaos for both businesses and customers alike during the busy Christmas and new year period, and Business Illawarra has been calling on the government to phase in close contact isolation exemptions to keep our businesses open as access to rapid antigen testing eventually improves," said Business Illawarra Executive Director Adam Zarth.

"The community should be pleased that this will now be able to occur, and we will start to see supermarket shelves and a range of shopping and dining outlets filling up again, and essential services being provided when required."

"Up to 75 percent of businesses in retail are [reporting](#) that they have staff in isolation and that isolation rules are causing supply chain and delivery issues, which are further impacted by weak customer demand."

"This decision was particularly necessary when you consider that many of the COVID-19 financial support programs provided to business by government have now been withdrawn.

"Now we just need to start seeing widespread availability of rapid antigen tests, and for many key workers, these should be subsidised," Mr Zarth said.

To manage the risks associated with this measure and balance the need to get the economy going again, at this stage the isolation exemptions are only available to workers in the following industries:

- Transport, freight and logistics
- Healthcare
- Emergency services including law enforcement, correctional services, energy resources and water, waste management
- Food, beverage and other critical good supplies
- Food distribution system and production system - this does not include hospitality
- Telecommunication, data, broadcasting and media
- Education and childcare

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**About Business Illawarra**

Formerly the Illawarra Business Chamber, *Business Illawarra* is the region's peak business organisation; a not-for-profit advocacy group dedicated to the economic development of the Illawarra.