

9 April 2024

Assoc Prof Catherine McDougall
Acting Chief Health Officer
Queensland Health

By email: [REDACTED]

Subject: Queensland Health staff sick leave and CHO hospital infection control visits

Dear Catherine

AMA Queensland members remain concerned about the current spread of various respiratory infections through our community, including from influenza, RSV, whooping cough and COVID. They are particularly alarmed that Queensland Health staff absences due to illness appear to be increasing, especially in our emergency departments (EDs).

Doctors have advised that Redcliffe and Ipswich EDs are experiencing significant staff absences, with each having up to 8 doctors on sick leave in recent days. We also note media reports published over the past week indicating capacity issues at Ipswich Hospital have resulted in patients being diverted to other hospitals.

This accords with feedback from doctors that Category 2 patients are now routinely not being seen within the required 10-minute timeframe at Ipswich ED. We also note Queensland Health's performance data for Q4 2023 shows a worsening in this measure over that period for Ipswich as well as an increase in Cat 2 presentations during the same timeframe.

Data for Q1 2024 has not yet been released by Queensland Health so we are unable to verify doctors' perceptions of the current situation. Similarly, staff absences due to illness are not published so we cannot determine if current rates are higher than in previous periods and could be fairly attributed to the current spread of respiratory viruses in the community. As such, we would be grateful for this and any further information the Department can provide that helps to illuminate these doctors' concerns.

In addition, we reference our mutual correspondence regarding infection controls in Queensland Health hospitals and Dr Gerrard's commitment to visit as many facilities as possible to develop suitable solutions. We respectfully suggest the Department consider the following

recent research publications to inform Dr Gerrard's discussions with Infection Prevention and Control Teams:

- 'Mandating indoor air quality for public buildings' by QUT's Distinguished Professor Lidia Morawska which recommends setting standards for indoor air quality (published 28 March 2024 in Science, [available here](#)); and
- the World Health Organisation's indoor airborne risk assessment tool (published March 2024, [available here](#)).

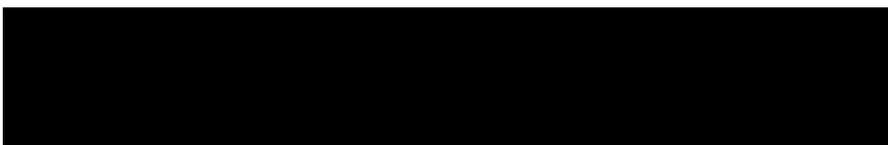
Furthermore, AMA Queensland members have stated they would welcome discussions on the following key topics during the hospital visits:

- the ongoing use and maintenance of readily available ventilation systems to ensure clear air, especially in high-risk settings such as EDs;
- ways to encourage a culture of infection control amongst hospital staff such as:
 - routine testing (including streamlined access to PCRs and results);
 - clear, standardised processes for symptomatic staff, including remaining home pending test results; and
 - the wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment;
- workplace health and safety developments in other jurisdictions regarding failures to implement risk mitigation and control measures.

We note Dr Gerrard is on leave until mid-May 2024 and would be grateful for any update you can provide as to the likely dates and possible itinerary for these visits.

As always, we would welcome an opportunity to collaborate with Queensland Health on these important issues and are available to meet if that would be of value to you or other Departmental staff.

Yours sincerely



Dr Maria Boulton
President
AMA Queensland

Dr Brett Dale
Chief Executive Officer
AMA Queensland