



Volunteer Support Guide – removal of COVID-19 vaccination mandate

On Friday 10 June 2022, the COVID-19 mandatory vaccination policy for all FES workers ended.

For volunteers this means that unvaccinated volunteers may return to regular duties and enter FES sites.

The vaccination mandate policy resulted in some volunteers electing to take a temporary leave of absence (LOA), operate remotely, or resign. Those currently operating remotely or on a LOA may return to their Brigade, Group or Unit (BGU) from 10 June 2022.

Volunteers who resigned and now wish to return are required to complete a new application form and undertake an application process.

We understand there may be some hesitancy or concern with unvaccinated persons returning to BGUs, and likewise for the volunteer looking to return to their BGU.

To assist this process, it is important that all volunteers, both current and returning, conduct themselves in a manner that is free from discrimination, conflict, or other form of unacceptable behaviour.

Below provides some direction for a smooth transition.

For Brigades, Groups and Units	For returning volunteers
As of 10.6.2022 there will be no Dept. of Health or DFES issued Direction or policy that prevents unvaccinated, volunteers from returning to their BGU.	As of 10.6.2022 you are eligible to return to active duty and enter FES sites.
What to do:	What to do:
Contact members currently on a LOA due to being unvaccinated, to confirm they are aware of the change. Ascertain their intent or willingness to return to the BGU and active duty.	Contact your BGU and notify your intent, the status and willingness to return to active duty, and the likely date of your return.
Confirm the date and duty status of returning members and advise the broader group.	Have a discussion with the leadership group and/or the team prior to your return to raise, work through, and resolve any concerns.
Have discussions with the volunteer group prior to the member(s) returning. Share and resolve any concerns, establish behaviour and other expectations, and consider any additional mitigation strategies that will relieve concerns or improve safety.	Be aware the mandatory vaccination policy remains for Hospitals, aged care, and disability care facilities. Attendance restrictions and conditions of entry (such as proof of vaccination) may apply.
The BGU leader, acting leader or leadership group shall have a separate discussion with the returning volunteer prior to their arrival. Per the group discussion, share and resolve any concerns prior to their re-entry, establish behaviour and other expectations, and update them of any new practices introduced (such as increased hygiene measures) while they've been away from the BGU.	
All current and returning members will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not adversely provoke the workplace • Be mindful of individual views and perspectives • Work together to ensure a safe workplace 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to be diligent and effectively implement strategies to manage the risks associated with COVID-19 	
As a team, focus on re-establishing a regular training, meeting, or exercise schedule.	
For leaders:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor behaviour. Intervene, address, and resolve any situations as they arise, with a view to correct and nip in the bud. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider additional opportunities for team building or cross-team or service, inter-regional training exercise to encourage participation. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor the ongoing COVID-19 situation, stay informed, and adjust practices accordingly, or upon instruction. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the DFES Code of Conduct and become acquainted with the new WorkSafe Codes of Practice (see DFES circular 96/2022). Request all members do the same. 	
Scenario Q & As:	
What about the additional risk(s) we may be exposed to from the unvaccinated member(s) returning?	<p>A: Unvaccinated persons may be more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 than a vaccinated person, however, the risk to vaccinated persons is not additionally heightened by unvaccinated persons returning to the BGU.</p> <p>However, as the vaccination mandate remains in place for hospitals, aged care, and disability care facilities – unvaccinated members may need to be temporarily excluded from attending or entering these facilities, particularly if proof of vaccination is a condition of entry.</p> <p>If concerns remain, please seek assistance from your District Officer.</p>
It doesn't seem fair that we all did the right thing – even if we didn't want to and now those that didn't comply with the policy can return – no questions asked?	<p>A: Whilst some feel it's not fair, on 10 June 2022 the mandatory vaccination policy ended and the requirement to be vaccinated against COVID-19 also concluded.</p> <p>This means there are no longer restrictions in place that would prevent a member from returning.</p>
If someone has resigned because of the vaccine mandate, are they eligible to be reinstated or will they need to re-apply like any other new member?	<p>A: Those who have resigned will be required to submit a new application form and undertake an application process.</p>
What if the returning member made previous (COVID-19) related comments or behaved in a way that raised concerns, but have not yet been addressed or resolved?	<p>A: Make a point to meet with the member privately prior to their return. Raise any issues with the intent to discuss, address and resolve prior to the member(s) returning to duty.</p> <p>Refer to the DFES Code of Conduct or Local Government Code of Conduct if a bushfire brigade, to reference and set certain behaviour expectations.</p> <p>If the matter remains unresolved, refer to next step processes documented in BGU rules or constitution, volunteer service administration guides, and Standing Operation Procedures (SOPs).</p>
I am not anti vax or pro vax – either way I want the BGU to remain free from vaccination related debates that incites or ends with actions / behaviour displaying discrimination, anger, withdrawal, or misconduct.	<p>A: Have discussions about appropriate conduct including expectations on behaviour with the entire group, and at the earliest convenience.</p>

	<p>Refer to and/or hand out conduct guides. For leaders, appropriately manage situations as they occur, prevent situations from escalating, and seek assistance if required.</p>
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