

MEDIA RELEASE

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TASMANIAN EMPLOYERS URGED TO BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT SICK CERTIFICATES

GPs are asking Tasmanian employers to adopt a pragmatic and flexible approach to their requirements for sick certificates during the current swine flu pandemic.

General Practice Tasmania spokesperson, Dr Judith Watson, said that “we know that general practices in Tasmania are experiencing significant increased demand from patients seeking appointments to obtain sick certificates and this is reducing time available to see patients in need of medical attention. The problem is also made worse by the fact that the practices themselves are starting to experience staff shortages from sickness.”

“Given that the spread of flu in the community is likely to increase over the next few weeks we want to make a plea to employers in particular to see if there are alternative forms of certification that they will accept. We also need to try to keep people with the flu, but who are otherwise well, away from general practices to help reduce the risk of infecting other patients – particularly those with underlying health problems.”

“These are exceptional circumstances and we need as many employers and patients to be as practical and reasonable as they can be until the pandemic passes. General practices across the State are also trying to adopt a flexible approach at the moment with some using their nursing staff to assess patient needs but it is very important that people know that GPs cannot back-date sick certificates – people must not contact their GP after their illness has passed and expect to be issued with a back-dated sick certificate. GPs are not legally able to do this.

“GPs can expect to be busy at this time of year anyway, but the current pandemic is putting a real strain on the system. Anything that we can do to reduce the demand for sick certificates at the moment will certainly help.” Dr Watson said

The General Practice Tasmania network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.



Dr Watson said that during the pandemic there are a number of practical tips for both employers and patients:

Practical Tips for Employers

- Consider flexibility to accept alternative forms of certification to a doctors certificate such as:
 - a statutory declaration from the employee
 - a statement of attendance from one of the State's flu clinics; or
 - a certificate from another health professional
- Put a policy in place regarding sick leave that will apply during the period of pandemic flu outbreak
- Communicate this policy to employees

Practical Tips for Employees needing to take sick leave

- Contact your employer at the onset of illness to find out what documentation is required
- If a sick certificate is required, determine the timeframe in which it is needed (eg within the next 2-3 days) and where this may be obtained
- If your employer insists on a certificate from a medical practitioner, ring your general practice and explain your needs and they will advise on the best way that these can be accommodated.

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