



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION **MEDIA RELEASE**

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24 July, 2020

Masks directive highlights workplace risks for nurses

After five months of raising safety concerns held by members, the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has welcomed today's decision by NSW Health instructing all public health workers to wear surgical masks within 1.5 metres of patients.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said the union had repeatedly highlighted the workplace risks for thousands of nurses and midwives because of their need to deliver care in close proximity to patients.

"While we welcome the decision to move to an amber alert, this clearly demonstrates our members have been working in much higher risk environments than the health service has been prepared to admit," said Mr Holmes.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, nurses and midwives have endured ongoing issues with access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and, at times, conflicting infection prevention advice.

"An expert risk assessment of the increase in community transmission of COVID-19 has prompted this 'moderate' risk warning and we appear to now have an abundant supply of masks for public health workers.

"Mask use is a welcome protection for all public hospital and community health workers and we will continue to pursue NSW Health over the issue of 'fit testing' and 'fit checking' for P2/N95 masks where required.

"This reinforces the essential work value of nurses and midwives who continue putting their own lives on the line to tackle the pandemic and protect their communities. Meanwhile, we're in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission begging for their 2.5% standard wage increase.

"All nurses and midwives, at a minimum, deserve to be acknowledged and deserve proper financial recognition for their daily sacrifices.

"It's an appalling situation, considering public health workers are essential but not valued by this government."

The NSWNMA is in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission again today, alongside other public sector unions, to oppose the wage freeze and further hearings are scheduled for 30 and 31 July.

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