



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

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## Mask mayhem putting life-saving nurses at risk

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has joined a chorus of health organisations demanding improved protocols and better Work Health and Safety standards for all health workers responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said despite a NSW Health issued 'amber alert' last month for public health workers to wear masks within 1.5 metres of all patients, access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to enhance workplace safety was an ongoing concern.

"At a minimum, nurses and other health workers in settings with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients should be protected with P2/N95 masks and fit tested to ensure they properly seal to their face," said Mr Holmes.

A recent survey of 1,270\* nurses and midwives in NSW has found almost half (44.8%) of those required to wear P2/N95 masks have not been fit tested to limit their exposure from the wrong size mask.

Alarming for public hospital nurses, only one-in-four working in a COVID-19 ward and one-in-three working in an intensive care unit said they had undergone a fit test.

A further 41% of respondents indicated they were worried about exposure at work due to interaction with potentially contagious patients who may be asymptomatic or untruthful during screening.

"For six months, frontline nurses and midwives have been going to work not knowing what will unfold, if they'll be at risk, or worse, be exposed because of inadequate protection," Mr Holmes said.

"Many nurses and midwives are still dealing with ongoing issues regarding access to adequate PPE and conflicting infection prevention advice. This cannot continue.

"We're still hearing of ICU nurses being told fit testing is not needed and despite being told stocks are 'plentiful', they are guarded under lock and key, or rationed out, with nurses left feeling guilty if they approach managers for additional supplies.

"Sadly, over 1,700 dedicated health workers have contracted COVID-19 in Victoria, with the majority just trying to care for patients and protect the community.

"We also stand with our [health colleagues in calling on the federal Health Minister](#) to increase the use of P2/N95 masks during the care of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

"Here in NSW, all health workers deserve to be acknowledged and deserve recognition for their ongoing sacrifices.

"At the end of the day, our public sector nurses and midwives just want to be paid fairly and be safe at work. Is that really too much to ask?" said Mr Holmes, referring to the public sector wage freeze debate.

The NSWNMA returns to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission from today (10-12 August) alongside other public sector unions to fight the Berejiklian Government's planned wage freeze.

*\*The NSWNMA survey of 1,270 nurses and midwives in public and private hospitals, community health and aged care settings was conducted over three weeks from 23 July – 6 August 2020.*



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