

Medical Specialist College exams

11 August 2020

This Guidance Note provides advice to medical specialist colleges on examinations scheduled during the current Stage 4 restrictions for metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions for Regional Victoria (effective from 6pm, Sunday 2 August 2020).

Scope

This guidance applies to all medical specialist examinations which are scheduled from 2 August – 13 September 2020 including:

- College of Intensive Care Medicine – Written Exams (17 August 2020)
- Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) – Primary exam (18 August 2020) and Final exam (28 August 2020).
- Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) Fellowship exams – 29 and 30 August 2020
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Fellowship exams – 8 September 2020

Whilst this guidance applies to examinations scheduled during the current Stage 4 restrictions within metropolitan Melbourne, given these could be extended, it is recommended that medical specialist colleges who have examinations planned from 13 September onwards, also consider this guidance in their planning processes.

Current Restrictions

To enable doctors to progress through their training, onsite specialist medical college exams **are permitted** under the current Stage 4 (and Stage 3) restrictions where they cannot be conducted remotely. The Department of Health and Human Services has been advised by specialist colleges that not all medical specialist college examinations are conducive to online assessments given the need for tightly controlled exam conditions and that there is also insufficient time to enable the development of alternative testing methodologies.

With this in mind, and to allow candidates to progress through their training, onsite examinations which require face to face or in person examination can proceed but should be conducted in a manner that minimises risk to all candidates and examiners.

Key principles

Medical specialist colleges are requested to consider the following key principles in their planning processes:

1. Victorian trainees should, wherever possible be assessed in Victoria to minimise the movement of staff during the current pandemic.
2. Movement of trainees and examiners across 'restriction zones' i.e. from regional or rural Victoria to Melbourne or vice versa, should be minimised where possible.
3. Consideration should be given to avoiding having groups of doctors within an enclosed space together for a prolonged period because of the heightened risk of transmission this poses and the potential effect this could have on our frontline workforce if there were to be a positive case of COVID-19 confirmed in the cohort.

Junior doctors in Victoria continue to face significant disruption to their education and training and medical specialist colleges are requested to have in place special consideration policies such as providing 2020 trainees who may not be successful in the exam in their first sitting, the option to re-sit the exam again in 2021 without incurring any education penalties.

Onsite examinations

The following advice should be considered in order to minimise risk to candidates and examiners when conducting face to face or onsite examinations:

1. Where possible, the exams should be conducted in the health services where the candidate is employed or within private rooms, with a responsible examiner or invigilator (who is already a fellow of the college the candidate is sitting exams for, or equivalent) supervising or assessing the candidate or candidates.
2. All local infection prevention and COVID-19 risk reduction protocols in place at the health service should be adhered to whilst conducting the exam, including physical distancing between invigilator/examiner and candidate(s). Consideration should be given to keeping the number of people within an exam room (candidates, and invigilators/examiners) to the absolute minimum that can be practically achieved at the site. This may mean using multiple rooms at a site.

Medical specialist colleges are encouraged to conduct their own assessments to determine whether or not having candidates sitting in the way described above at the health service where they are employed or in private rooms is feasible and practical, and if not, consider delaying exams while the Stage 4 restrictions are in force.

If delaying exams is not feasible, and they cannot be conducted in the preferred way as advised above, the examinations are still permitted to proceed but there should be strict COVID Safe measures in place at any site where they are conducted.

From 11:59pm Wednesday 5 August, all employers who require staff to attend a work site must issue a Permitted Worker permit to their employees. Doctors can use their photo ID issued by the health service to commute from their place of residence to the health service/private rooms or other site where the exam is being conducted. Additional information is available from <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/permitted-worker-scheme-covid-19>.

Next Steps

Please direct all queries relating to this Guidance to medicalworkforce@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

As Victoria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, this advice may change to reflect the current public health advice.

The latest public health advice regarding the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) can be accessed from the Department of Health and Human Service's website - www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus.