

# Australia Post ends contactless delivery, COVID-19 isolation

**Jim Franklin**  
27 October 2022

Late last month, the Communications Electrical and Plumbers Union (CEPU) emailed Australia Post (AP) workers informing them that the last remaining COVID-19 safety measures at the state-owned mail service would be ended.

The union wrote: “As COVID restrictions continue to be relaxed and our society, as a whole, returns to some sort of post-COVID ‘normality,’ Australia Post has ceased contactless delivery arrangements, in most circumstances.”

Postal workers must now hand their scanners over to customers to sign the touch screen when accepting parcels. This will heighten the chances of infection, placing workers, their families, and other members of the public in a dangerous situation.

The CEPU email says that postal workers who are severely immunocompromised can seek an exemption from their facility manager. This will require workers to provide written advice from a doctor who has “reviewed the signature on delivery process,” stating “that this requirement would pose an unacceptable risk to your health.”

This, however, will only be possible “whilst COVID-19 restrictions still exist within Australia.” With virtually all public health measures already torn down, it is likely that soon even advice from a medical professional confirming an “unacceptable risk” to a worker’s health will not be sufficient grounds for an exemption.

The fact that the CEPU, not AP, notified workers of this change is a stark expression of the union leadership’s complete disregard for the health and lives of their members. It also illustrates the role of the union as an arm of management.

The company initially attempted to end contactless delivery on August 19, but faced such hostility from workers that it was forced to back down within hours. The CEPU claimed credit for the about-face, declaring at the

time that the “unreasonable directive put members at an imminent, unnecessary and avoidable risk of contracting COVID-19.”

Within six weeks, the union had assumed the leading role in slashing the safety measure, having likely assured AP the CEPU was better placed than management to implement the change without stirring up opposition from workers.

In addition to the change in tactics, the CEPU was aided in delivering this management demand by the relentless government and media propaganda campaign insisting that COVID-19 is a thing of the past.

Since the first attempt to end contactless delivery, the Labor-dominated “National Cabinet” has ended daily reporting of infections and deaths in every state except Victoria, as well as the requirement for individuals to report positive rapid antigen tests.

More recently, mandatory isolation periods for people infected with COVID-19 have been eliminated around the country, along with paid pandemic leave.

These moves were welcomed by AP management. At recent workplace briefings workers were told that if they contract COVID-19 they should simply treat it as a normal cold or flu. Any time off work due to infection with the highly transmissible and deadly virus will be deducted from their normal sick leave balance.

With virtually all public health measures abandoned, and the constant evolution of new variants, workers face the prospect of one COVID-19 infection after another. This will quickly exhaust their sick days, leaving unpaid time off as their only option. Amid soaring inflation and successive interest rate rises, this is a “luxury” few workers can afford, and many will be compelled to continue working, knowing they are putting their coworkers at risk.

The CEPU has met this reckless shift, which will undoubtedly lead to waves of infection sweeping through

AP facilities, with a stony silence, effectively giving management a green light.

Throughout the pandemic, the CEPU, along with all other unions, has played the central role in suppressing the opposition of workers to the removal of COVID-19 restrictions and forcing workers to remain on the job, while working closely with management to cover up workplace infections.

In July 2021, the New South Wales Liberal-National government announced lockdowns in several Sydney “hotspots” where infection figures were highest. Within hours, the unions went hand-in-hand with big business to lobby the government for exemptions to keep facilities operating despite the danger to workers health and safety.

In April 2020, AP management seized upon the pandemic as a phoney pretext to implement the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM). This was a restructuring initiative, years in the making, which had nothing to do with the health and safety of workers, but was instead designed to cut costs and shift resources from letters to the more lucrative parcel division, with a view to future full or partial privatisation.

The CEPU was instrumental in imposing and suppressing opposition to the ADM, which massively increased workloads and resulted in thousands of workers leaving AP. The union signed a memorandum of understanding with management, delaying enterprise bargaining negotiations for a year, which had the effect of making it illegal for workers to strike against the restructure.

The ending of the ADM was not the product of a union campaign against the hated model, as the CEPU falsely claimed, but of the ADM’s failure to deliver the financial and structural outcomes management demanded. Its replacement, the Sustainable Delivery Model (SDM), is not a return to a mythical “golden age,” but a renewed offensive driven by the same profit motives as the ADM.

Workplace health and safety is again being used as a cover, this time to introduce stepped-up monitoring and surveillance of postal workers throughout their shifts, both inside AP facilities and on their delivery rounds. The data collected through these mechanisms will be used to scrutinise workers’ every move, as the basis for disciplinary action and to demand ever-increasing “productivity.”

Since the start of 2022, the “let it rip” COVID-19 policies, demanded by business, enacted by government, and enforced by the unions, have infected more than ten million people in Australia and killed more than 13,350.

The conditions have now been set for a further escalation of COVID-19 infections throughout the working class. Epidemiologists are warning that with the growth of new vaccine-resistant variants and their rapid and uncheck global spread, workers everywhere confront a high chance of reinfection, with the danger of severe illness and debilitating Long COVID increasing with each subsequent infection.

The CEPU’s endorsement of the axing of contactless delivery and the dangerous lie that COVID-19 is like the flu is just the latest reminder that workers cannot entrust their health and safety to the union or management.

Instead, postal workers must take matters into their own hands and form rank-and-file committees in every facility to monitor COVID-19, along with all other workplace health and safety issues.

These committees must take responsibility for demanding that mitigation measures—including ventilation, carbon dioxide monitoring and N95 masks—are implemented, and ensuring all workers are informed of the ongoing danger of the pandemic. In the event of COVID-19 infections inside the facility, workers, not management, must assess the situation and determine what steps must be taken, including PCR testing of the entire workforce, and where appropriate, the temporary closure of the site.

But postal workers cannot protect themselves and their families from the deadly pandemic simply through their own actions. As a first step, rank-and-file committees at AP must reach out to the other sections of “frontline” workers, in schools, hospitals, factories and the transport sector, to demand the reinstatement of public health measures across Australia.

Ultimately, however, what is required is a fight by the international working class, informed by the best available scientific and medical advice, for the global elimination of COVID-19.

*We urge Australia Post and other delivery workers to contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee today, to discuss this perspective and the formation of rank-and-file committees.*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**