

COVID-19:

Information for cleaners in CAF-certified buildings



Current as of 9 April 2020

If you work in a CAF-certified building, that means we have checked that you have good working conditions. As part of this check, CAF surveyed and spoke to cleaners at your building about pay, safety standards, workloads, and job security at change of contract.

Cleaners are frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, working hard to keep buildings clean and safe for members of the public. You play an important role in helping to reduce the spread of the virus.

CAF exists to uphold cleaners' labour rights. Cleaning contractors, building managers, and building owners at CAF-certified buildings are committed to providing fair pay and safe working conditions to cleaners.

This factsheet provides information about questions you may have about your job and your rights in the context of COVID-19, what options you have if you are affected by this crisis, and where to go for assistance.

Personal leave

If you are unable to work due to coronavirus, for example if you have to go into isolation or care for someone who has coronavirus, you are entitled to take paid personal (sick) leave if you are permanent or fixed term and you have accrued personal leave. You are entitled to take unpaid personal leave if you are a casual.

[Some employers](#) are offering 14 days' paid special leave for all employees (including casuals) who cannot attend work due to the coronavirus.

You cannot be fired because of a [temporary absence from work due to illness](#).

Check with your employer and your [union](#) if you have any questions about taking paid or unpaid leave if you or someone you care for has coronavirus, or you are required to isolate due to contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case.

Safe working conditions

Your employer must ensure that you have a safe work environment at all times. This includes providing you with the personal protective equipment (PPE) you need to do your job safely, including:

- disposable gloves,
- easy access to water and soap and hand sanitisers,
- supplies of chemicals and cleaning materials including regularly washed or disposable cloths, disinfectant, and
- safe workloads.

Do you need a mask at all times?

No: Current advice from the [Department of Health](#) is that masks are not helpful in preventing uninfected workers from contracting the virus, they are only needed to prevent people who have coronavirus from spreading it to others. However, if you are asked to clean an area where there is a known contamination of COVID-19, your employer should inform you of the contamination and provide you with additional personal protective equipment, including a mask.

If you believe your safety is at risk, talk to your employer and/or your [union](#).



Reduced work opportunities and income

Many businesses are being affected by government measures to contain COVID-19, including office workers working from home, and retail stores closing down. This means that office buildings and shopping centres may have fewer cleaning requirements which can mean cleaners will lose hours, be asked to take annual leave, or be stood down without pay.

Some building owners are following best-practice and keeping regular cleaning hours, however cost pressures from tenants closing down are having a significant impact on their capacity to retain full cleaning service provision.

Can I be stood down without pay?

Yes: According to Australian [workplace law](#), employers are able to stand employees down, without pay, during a period in which an employee cannot usefully be employed because of situations including “a stoppage of work for any cause for which the employer cannot reasonably be held responsible.”

During a stand-down, you remain employed, although you are not required to perform work and you are not paid during the period of the stand-down. You will, however, continue to accrue annual leave and

personal leave entitlements while you are stood down. You must also be paid for public holidays during the stand down period.

Your employer will inform you when you can return to work at the end of the stand down, and should keep you regularly updated in the meantime.

If you are stood down or if your shifts are reduced, what are your income options?

JobKeeper payment

The Australian Government has passed the JobKeeper payment legislation, which provides a wage subsidy to your employer to keep paying you even if you are stood down. The JobKeeper payment is \$1500 per fortnight for eligible employees and will be backdated to 31 March 2020.

To be eligible, you need to have been employed on 1 March 2020 as a full-time, part-time, or casual (for more than 12 months). At this time, casuals who have been employed for less than 12 months with their current employer are not eligible (however may be eligible for the JobSeeker Payment – see below); and employees on temporary work visas (e.g. international students) are not currently eligible. We will update this information if JobKeeper is expanded to include workers in these categories.

Your employer will apply for the JobKeeper scheme and contact you if you are eligible to receive it. If you think you are eligible to receive the JobKeeper payment and your employer has registered for it but has not contacted you, please contact United Workers Union.

The Australian Government’s [fact sheet](#) outlines eligibility for employees.

JobSeeker payment

If your employer is not eligible for the JobKeeper program, or if you are a casual that has been employed for less than 12 months with your employer, you may be eligible to receive a [JobSeeker payment](#) of up to \$1100 per fortnight from the Australian Government when you are stood down. If you are not a resident or a citizen, in most circumstances, e.g. if you are an international student, you are not currently able to access any form of JobSeeker payment.

Certain humanitarian visa holders (TPV, SHEV, Bridging Visa F) may be eligible. If you are in the process of applying for a partner visa, you may also be eligible. CAF will update this guidance if workers in other visa categories become eligible for support.

If you think you are eligible, here is a [guide](#) on how to apply. One of the things you will need is a letter from your employer confirming:

- your employment
- hours of work and ordinary salary/wage rate
- confirmation that you have been stood down without pay.

Your union United Workers Union can provide more detailed guidance on how to apply for the JobSeeker payment.

If you require basic information in another language the ACTU has translated advice about the JobSeeker payment into Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Persian, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Greek [here](#).

If you are facing financial distress and you live in NSW, there are some [supports for international students](#) (food, housing, legal, health). We will update this section with supports in other states as they become available.

Can I take annual leave or long service leave?

If you are not eligible for government income support, taking annual leave or long service might also be an option. Ask your employer if you can use your annual leave if you have an accrued entitlement.

Note: your employer cannot force you to take annual leave if you do not want to. See the 'For more information' section at the end of this factsheet for information about portable long service leave.

What is CAF doing to protect cleaners at this time?

- Monitoring workplace health and safety conditions at CAF-certified buildings
- Encouraging building owners and managers to maintain cleaning service provision so that your employer can keep you employed

- Advising tenants to maintain cleaning service provision so that your employer can keep you employed
- Advising your employer to provide a safe work environment, to consult with you on any changes to rosters, cuts to hours or in the event of shut down.
- Consulting with your union, United Workers Union, on measures to support you during this unprecedented event.

If you want to report any workplace issues to CAF relating to COVID-19

Complete the [CAF Coronavirus survey](#). We will leave this survey open throughout the duration of the COVID-19 crisis and provide regular reports to your employer, the building manager, and the building owner. Your response to the survey will be treated confidentially. You can complete the survey more than once, if your working conditions change.

You can also contact [United Workers Union](#) if you have any questions or concerns.

For more information

The Fair Work Ombudsman has provided some [guidance](#) around your workplace rights regarding COVID-19.

The ACTU, the peak body for unions in Australia, has provided some detailed information about [Occupational Health and Safety](#) and COVID-19.

United Workers Union has a factsheet on [supports and services](#) during COVID-19.

Contact [United Workers Union](#) if you have any questions about your rights during COVID-19 and for assistance with legal matters.

If COVID-19 is creating issues with your visa conditions, you can access free immigration advice and visa service from Unions NSW and the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre [here](#).

SBS has information about COVID-19 in Australia in 63 different languages, you can stay up to date [here](#).

To find out if you are eligible to take portable long service leave at this time, contact the relevant state body: [ACT](#), [NSW](#), [Queensland](#), [Victoria](#)