



Respiratory Protection Program: Fit Testing for Patient-Facing Staff

Project Team Leader: Lauren Wiggins

Project Team Members: Angela McAninly, Chen Xu, Carol Barber, Gabrielle Nagle, Jackie Krastins, Karen Goddard, Kellie Bennett, Liesl Stellenboom, Nicole Miller, Nurhani Tulawie, Praveen Petrak Kumar

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in the use of Protective Personal Equipment (PPE), particularly the use of Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE). Fit testing is a validated method of determining if a P2/N95 respirator provides an adequate seal on the wearer's face, thereby providing adequate protection against airborne particles.

The Barwon Health Respiratory Protection Program was established with the aim of minimising a healthcare worker's exposure to infectious and hazardous airborne particles, such as COVID-19.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify staff working in high-risk clinical areas that may be at risk of COVID-19 transmission
2. Provide fit testing to staff to ensure they are wearing correctly fitting RPE
3. Provide staff with education surrounding the use of RPE
4. Reduce staff exposure to COVID-19, therefore reducing the requirement for staff furloughing

METHODS + IMPLEMENTATION

The Barwon Health Respiratory Protection was established in late 2020, with the aim of minimising the Barwon Health workforce's exposure to the COVID-19 virus. This program was guided by the Victorian Respiratory Protection Program.

A risk assessment was performed and 4,500 staff were identified as requiring access to fit testing, with 3,500 of these staff categorised as high risk.

Fit testing high-risk staff commenced in January 2021, with high-risk areas such as ED, ICU and designated COVID-19 wards receiving priority access to the service.

An increase in community transmission of the Delta variant in September 2021 saw a change to PPE requirements, with all patient-facing staff now required to wear P2/N95 respirators, therefore increasing the demand for fit testing.

Select Category

- Safe Care
- Personal Care
- Effective Care
- Connected Care

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

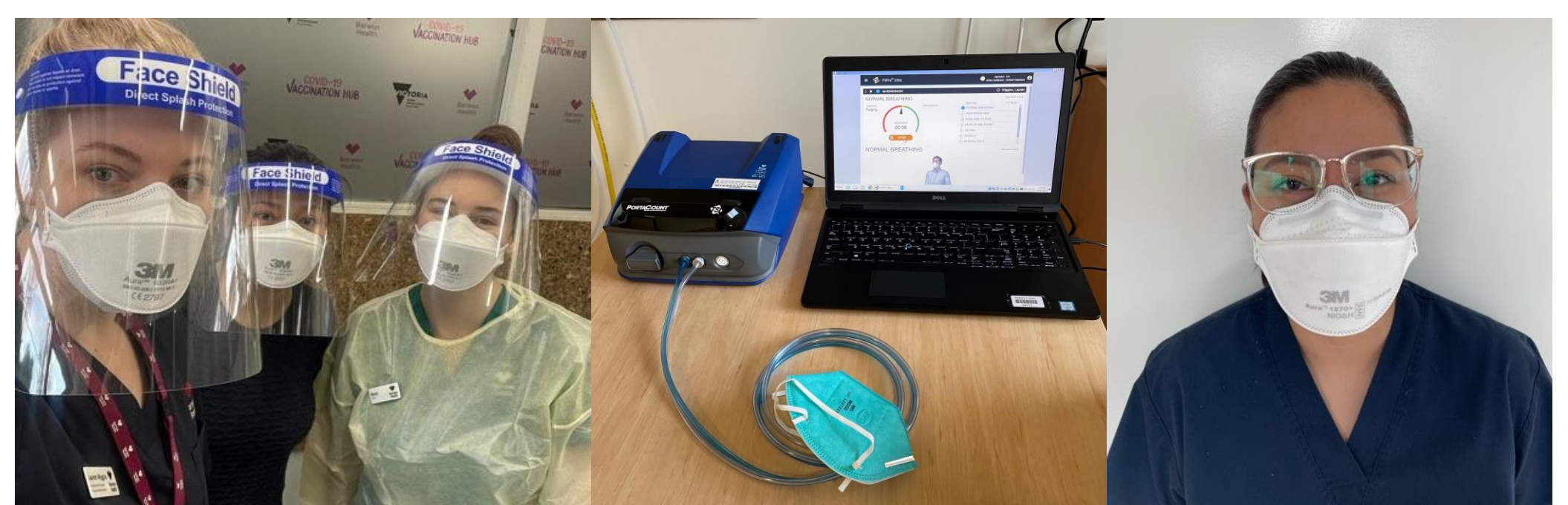
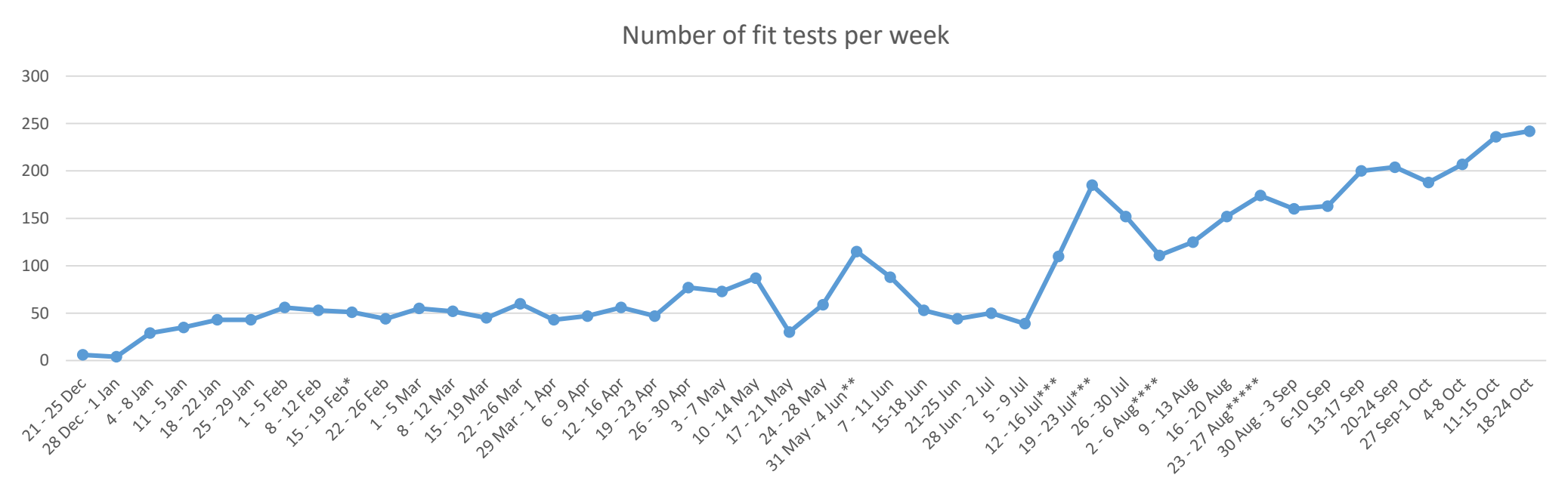
A team of 12 staff provided fit testing to clinical staff, non-clinical staff, students and contractors across the organisation. Managers of clinical areas were provided with regular reports to highlight staff who required fit testing, as well as enabling them to order the RPE required to protect their staff.

RESULTS

- 3,884 staff, students and contractors have been fit tested across the organisation
- Fit testing appointment attendance has increased from an average of 30 appointments attended weekly on commencement of the program, to over 230 appointments being attended weekly
- The fit testing program has a central location within Building B, however the team has also attended the organisation's aged care facilities and Ford vaccination hub to meet demand

SUSTAINABILITY

The Respiratory Protection Program has worked to support and protect Barwon Health staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Fit testing staff in patient-facing areas has helped to protect from airborne respiratory hazards such as COVID-19, and ongoing support and education has ensured staff are using RPE safely and effectively. The program has been supported and implemented for all Barwon Health staff and will be budgeted until it is no longer required.



Acknowledgement to the Barwon South West Public Health Unit, Barwon Health Infection Prevention Services, Barwon Health Procurement and Supply Department and the Victorian Respiratory Protection Program – Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)