



# People at Risk for Serious illness from COVID-19

(16/3/2020)

While we continue to learn more about COVID 19 each day, it is believed that patients who are immunosuppressed are at a higher risk of becoming unwell with the virus. It is important that you still attend your appointments unless advised by your doctor or nurse. People who are immunosuppressed are at greater risk of getting infections but there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce the chances of getting an infection.

**WASH YOUR HANDS** with soap and water for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand wash. Wash your hands when you come into contact with others, before eating or touching your face, after using the bathroom and upon entering your home.

**CLEAN AND DISINFECT YOUR HOME** to remove germs. Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces such as; mobile phones, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets and taps.

**KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE between yourself and others.** Maintain social distancing outside of your home by leaving at least a one meter distance between yourself and others

**AVOID PEOPLE WHO ARE UNWELL** If you are in public and notice someone coughing/sneezing or visibly unwell, please move away from them to protect yourself. Ensure that family/friends do no visit if they are displaying any symptoms of illness such as fever, coughing, sneezing, headache, etc.

**AVOID CROWDS** especially in poorly ventilated spaces. Your risk of exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 may increase in crowded, closed-in settings with little air circulation if there are people in the crowd who are sick.

**AVOID ALL NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL** including plane trips, and especially avoid embarking on cruise ships.

If a COVID-19 outbreak happens in your community, it could last for a long time. An outbreak is when a large number of people suddenly get sick. Depending on how severe the outbreak is, public health officials may recommend community actions to reduce people's risk of being exposed to the virus. If COVID-19 is spreading in your local community, it is important that you stay at home as much as possible. To prepare for this you may need to have *over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.)* to treat fever and other symptoms.

## WHO IS AT RISK OF COVID-19 INFECTION

People currently considered to be at risk of contracting COVID-19 infection are those who have fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough or sore throat AND:

- Have returned from overseas travel in the last 14 days, OR
- Have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, OR
- Believe they have been in close contact with a person at risk of COVID-19.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I BECOME UNWELL?

1. If you are mildly unwell, have viral symptoms (e.g. fever and cough) and believe you may have been exposed to coronavirus, please contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line and your GP as a first step. Appropriate screening for coronavirus will be organised through these services, but you should highlight that you have an underlying condition (ie liver transplant). We are happy to be contacted by your GP for further advice as required. For the safety of other patients, please do not present to clinic with these symptoms. We will rebook your appointments when you ring to let us know about your illness.
2. If you are known to be immunosuppressed or are having treatment expected to cause immunosuppression, and you become unwell or develop fevers >37.5C for 30min you should follow the usual advice given to you by your health care team and present to the emergency department.
3. PLEASE NOTE: If you have cough or shortness of breath you should phone ahead (64573333) so appropriate triage can be organised.

**Most immunosuppressed patients in this situation will have a cause other than Covid-19, however we are putting precautions in place until this is excluded. Please understand that this may result in changes to previous pathways, but it is done with the safety of all patients in mind.**

3. If you are very unwell you should call an ambulance and organise immediate transfer to the emergency department as you usually would.

## IF I'M CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO IS IMMUNOSUPPRESSED, HOW DO I KEEP THEM SAFE?

- Practice good respiratory hygiene by covering your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, discarding used tissues immediately into a closed bin. Please note you do not need to wear a face mask if you are healthy. Try and organise alternative care/carers if you are unwell.
- Cleaning your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Avoiding close contact with anyone who has cold or flu-like symptoms.
- **If you suspect you may have coronavirus symptoms or may have had close contact with a person who has coronavirus, you should contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080.**
- To support the WA Health response to COVID-19, the Minister for Health has confirmed that those people who are not eligible for Medicare AND who present to WA Health facilities for assessment in relation to COVID-19 infection, will not receive a bill.

### WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR YOUR OUTPATIENTS VISITS

- We may need to change clinic or treatment appointments at short notice, please be flexible.
- Clinic appointments may be converted to telephone or telehealth appointments.
- Before every visit to the Outpatient appointments please consider if you have travelled overseas within 14 days, had contact with persons with or suspected of having COVID19 AND if you are unwell with respiratory symptoms including cough, fever, shortness of breath. Please follow the advice above.

For more information and real time updates please visit

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

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