



2 February 2022

This regular COVID-19 update has been introduced to summarise the health system's ongoing response to COVID-19.

Significant milestones and developments will continue to be communicated as we prepare our health system to respond to increased community transmission of COVID-19.

## COVID-19 care at home

Most people with COVID-19 will be able to safely monitor and care for themselves at home, with the support of a general practitioner if needed.

For people at greater risk from COVID-19 the Department of Health has engaged Calvary Medibank, to support COVID-19 triage, monitoring and escalation of eligible patients at home. [The COVID Care at Home program](#) focuses on those most at risk to ensure they receive the care they need.

People who are registered for the program will receive advice from the Department of Health on symptoms to watch for and actions to take to support them in their home.

[HealthDirect](#) is also available to all Australians to provide free 24/7 advice for those caring for themselves at home.

## Elective surgery procedures

At a time to be determined by the Chief Health Officer, all elective procedures in the public and private sector (medium and large hospitals) will reduce to only essential Category 1 and 2 cases for approximately 8 weeks, including day procedures.

This proposed 8-week reduction aligns with the length of the expected COVID-19 peak.

Some small day hospitals will be exempt from the elective surgery constraints because their capacity to support the surge requirements is limited.

Health Service Providers (HSPs) will be provided with the number of elective surgeries they can undertake. Within the case volume HSPs can select those most time-critical based on clinical assessment and need.

# St John Ambulance

St John Ambulance (SJA) has advised the department that the organisation has robust business continuity plans in place and are well-prepared for increased community transmission of COVID-19.

SJA is reviewing the triple zero service to manage an increase in calls and SJA Urgent Care Centres are also being reviewed to optimise support to the community.

A key learning from other states was the increased volume of calls for non-life-threatening matters which had flow-on impacts for all triple zero services.

Once emergency department patient testing commences as described in the testing strategy, SJA will also assist by performing Rapid Antigen Testing during emergency patient transport where this can be done safely.

## Staff furlough and leave guidelines

[WA Health's guidelines](#) on high risk exposure in a workplace setting and healthcare worker furlough (leave of absence) should be implemented immediately.

Where a worker has been exposed to a COVID-19 case in a workplace setting where the risk of exposure is defined as high, the worker must:

- quarantine for 7 days since last contact with COVID-19 case
- PCR/RAT self-test (PCR preferred while laboratory capacity allows) on Day 1 and Day 6
- return to work on Day 7, if Day 1 and 6 results are negative and worker is asymptomatic
- RAT self-test on Days 8, 10 and 12

- remain vigilant for symptoms, and RAT self-test if COVID-19 symptoms occur.

If returning to work after the initial 7-day quarantine period, the staff member must wear a P2/N95 mask at all times while working, wear a surgical mask at all other times when outside the home and refrain from visiting shared break areas.

The department will implement a priority stream for healthcare workers to access PCR tests where laboratory capacity allows.

These guidelines will be updated in line with the essential workers guidelines once there is a large number of community cases.

## System Alert and Response

As announced earlier this week, the [Framework for System Alert and Response \(SAR\)](#) identifies specific actions and provides clinical guidance to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission and help deliver safe and appropriate care.

The SAR consists of 2 key components – alert levels which determine the COVID-19 risk rating for the health system by geographical areas and 4 risk ratings, from low to very high, to reflect changing risks from COVID-19 in the community.

More information on how the SAR will be implemented across the hospital system can be found [here](#).

## COVID-19 public hospital visitor guideline

The [COVID-19 Public Hospital Visitor Guideline](#) was also updated this week to provide recommendations for healthcare services for all patient visitors to public hospitals including:

- hospital access and restrictions
- minimum personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements
- testing and vaccination status.

The guideline also outlines exceptional circumstances to visitor restrictions and advice around visiting confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases.

## Masks in WA healthcare facilities

All staff are reminded of the importance of hand hygiene when putting on, removing and while wearing face masks. Touching the front of your mask can contaminate your hands and frequent hand hygiene is recommended.

Ensure your mask fits well over your mouth and nose – the better your face mask fits, the less you will need to adjust it.

### **Healthcare facilities**

All staff, both clinical and non-clinical, must wear a surgical mask on entry into any WA healthcare facility, including all hospitals, outpatient, aged care, community health and hospital in the home services. Healthcare facilities are required to supply surgical masks free of charge.

N95 masks must be used in all emergency department areas.

Surgical masks can be worn for up to 4 hours; however, they should be changed when they become moist or soiled and following any meal breaks.

### **Corporate offices**

It is preferred that staff working in offices wear surgical masks while at the workplace, however fabric masks may be worn if they are:

- made of 3 layers
- secure and close-fitting for the wearer (i.e. fit under the chin and over the nose and do not require continual adjustment)
- changed if they become moist or soiled (staff should ensure they have more than one mask per day if they are wearing it for most of their working day)
- washed regularly – if worn for most of a day your mask should be washed in hot water with mild laundry detergent each day.