



9 February 2022

Elective surgery bookings

As [announced yesterday](#), for a 2-month period starting 28 February, public hospitals will pause booking multi-day non-urgent Category 2 and 3 elective surgeries.

It is expected that surgeries booked prior to this date will be performed.

Category 1 surgeries will continue as normal.

There will be a weekly cap on Category 2 procedures provided to Health Service Providers (HSPs) and within this, treating clinicians can determine the urgency of treatment. If health system demand is less than anticipated by 28 February, this cap will be reviewed.

The decision to pause bookings has been made proactively to avoid having to make snap decisions to cancel surgery at short notice, as experienced in other states. It will allow health staff to be redeployed to key hospital areas and those affected by staff updates.

Health Services Providers will provide further details about surgery numbers to affected staff over the coming days.

New testing and isolation protocols

As Western Australia begins to experience a high caseload environment, [new protocols](#) have been announced to manage transmission and minimise disruption to the community.

The changes include:

- PCR tests remain the recommended tool for diagnosing COVID-19, however Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) are now an acceptable diagnostic tool.
- Upon returning a positive RAT result, a compulsory online registration system must be used to report the result to the Department of Health.
- Updated definition of a close contact now applies.
- Isolation for close contacts has been reduced to 7 days.
- Quarantine for approved and vaccinated overseas travellers has been reduced to 7 days at suitable premises.

Casual contacts are no longer identified, however people who experience symptoms should get tested immediately.

System Alert and Response

Broader rollout of Amber rating imminent

The [System Alert and Response Framework](#) (SAR) identifies specific actions and provides clinical guidance to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission and help deliver safe and appropriate care.

The current risk rating for the Perth, Peel and South West regions is Interim Amber.

The transition to Amber for these regions is imminent and staff are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the SAR's full Amber requirements to ensure readiness.

As widespread transmission of COVID-19 is expected to occur throughout the State, staff in all regions should also ensure they are familiar with the SAR and requirements for Interim Amber as a priority.

Patient transport

Rapid Antigen Testing during ambulance transport

St John Ambulance (SJA) will soon undertake Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) on patients and essential carers being conveyed to an emergency department or nursing posts by ambulance within regions with a current Interim Amber status. This will roll out across all regions as the status changes.

This will help identify the COVID-19 status of patients before they enter a healthcare facility and reduce the time it takes for patients to enter the emergency department system. Ambulance crews will be recording the RAT outcome on the clinical documentation and will hand over the test result upon arrival.

This testing arrangement does not apply to:

- patients who know their COVID-19 status
- patients who refuse to be tested
- situations where transport is time critical
- mental health patients
- inter-hospital transfers
- patients being transported for booked appointments.

Patients discharged from hospital

After being discharged from hospital, a COVID-19 positive patient can travel home via:

- taxi or rideshare service
- transported by friends or family
- their own vehicle if safe to drive.

Ambulances should not be used for routine transport.

All options require that the discharged patient and other vehicle occupants wear suitable PPE. The discharged patient should also appropriately distance from other people in the vehicle – for example, sitting in the back seat opposite the driver.

Personal Protective Equipment

Procurement and supply

The WA health system has a well-established sourcing and distribution strategy for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

To support the WA health system's response to COVID-19, HSS has placed an additional \$73 million of PPE orders, including:

- 29 million N95 / Particulate filter respirators (PFR) masks
- 25 million surgical masks
- 55 million examination gloves.
- 2 million safety glasses and goggles.

Whilst we have sufficient supplies of PPE, all staff are encouraged to maintain appropriate usage of PPE and avoid stockpiling.

Fit testing and N95 masks

Fit testing measures the effectiveness of the seal between the respirator and the wearer's face.

An N95 is only as safe and effective as a general surgical mask if it is not properly fit tested.

Some staff can be fitted to several masks while others can only be fitted to one or 2 types.

90 per cent of staff have been fit tested to the following 3 N95 masks (and approved substitutes) and are available with more than 2.8m million in stock.

- 3M 1870+ Aura Small/Medium Flat (201356K)
- Halyard Fluidshield Medium Flat (210353R)
- Essity BSN Proshield Medium Flat (172776F).

If you have been fit tested to these masks, please order/use them to ensure we can support other staff who can only rely on other models of N95 masks to keep them safe.

If you have not yet been fit tested, please contact the service within your HSP and make an appointment.

COVID testing

People anywhere in WA experiencing any symptoms, but especially in the Perth, Peel, Wheatbelt and South West regions, are being urged to get tested and isolate until they receive a negative result even if they have not visited a listed exposure site.

[COVID testing clinics](#) have increased opening hours and arrangements with private partners are being extended to maximise collections and manage demand.

All public COVID testing locations are being supplied with RATs to enable demand management if surges occur.

Rapid Antigen Testing

Rapid Antigen Testing commenced in our emergency departments (EDs) and labour wards last week – thank you to all staff who have helped to implement this new requirement.

Many EDs now have adopted additional temporary infrastructure to facilitate the streaming of patients and application of RAT testing.

All sites are now preparing for testing requirements in accordance with the forthcoming Amber rating.

This will include testing for staff who work with high risk patients and in high risk areas. Further instruction will be provided to staff in coming days as implementation details are finalised.

COVID-19 vaccination update

The program continues to focus efforts on increasing vaccinations amongst priority cohorts including Aboriginal people, medically at-risk groups and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Door-to-door and in-reach vaccination services are 2 approaches being utilised to assist at-risk people who have difficulty attending a clinic.

A new booster vaccination blitz to encourage Western Australians to have their booster vaccination started this week, adding an additional 40,000 appointments available in state-run clinics over the coming fortnight.

Individuals aged 16 and 17 are now eligible to receive a booster dose, 3 months after their second primary course vaccination.

Visit the [WA Government COVID-19 dashboard](#) for daily vaccination statistics.

Mental Health

The Office of the Chief Psychiatrist has prepared [a fact sheet](#) for Mental Health Services which details interaction between the Mental Health Act and Public Health in the management of mental health consumers.

A Mental Health readiness checklist will be finalised and available for services in coming days.