WA Health’s System Alert and Response (SAR) – COVID-19 Framework

WA is entering a period of transition as it adapts to living with COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Framework for System Alert and Response (SAR) describes the processes and interventions developed for the WA public hospital system to respond to the risks posed by COVID-19.

The SAR provides overarching guidance for public hospitals to manage and mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19 transmission. This will help protect patients and maintain appropriate and safe care to all patients, visitors and staff.

Those leading WA Health’s COVID-19 response will use current WA COVID-19 case data, vaccination rates and service delivery intelligence for geographical areas to aid decision making on alert and response levels at a statewide, regional or local level.

The SAR outlines activities and actions which should be taken by health services in response to changing levels of risk.

In areas experiencing high COVID-19 case numbers, the measures described will provide higher levels of protection for patients, visitors and staff and the entire WA community.

These measures will mean that other disruptions can be minimised and allow, wherever possible, for the continuation of services including in-person attendance at outpatient services and elective surgery.

It also provides guidance for some public health services, such as publicly funded community dental services and community-based health care services. Non-government health care organisations, including private hospitals play a role in managing systemwide hospital demand, and may find the guidance useful when determining their own strategies and responses to mitigating risks to patients and service delivery associated with COVID-19.

The SAR will help clinical teams readily find the right information to keep themselves and their patients safe.

How will it work?

The SAR consists of 2 key components – alert levels which determine the COVID-19 risk rating for geographical areas of the health system and levels of responses, which contain consistent actions and interventions for health services to take at each alert level.

It contains four risk ratings:

- green (COVID Ready)
- amber (COVID Alert)
• red (Widespread transmission) and
• black (System (or part of the system e.g.; public health response, testing, collection and lab capacity and/or provision of healthcare related services responding to COVID-19) at Capacity).

These levels are designed to reflect the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community and will be informed by several factors including; the prevalence of COVID-19 cases within high risk communities, individual geographic areas or across the state, vaccination rates, pathology testing capacity and other health system response capacity.

The SAR has been developed to be flexible and to provide clear escalation and de-escalation guidance for public health services in Western Australia and will facilitate rapid decision making by the Chief Health Officer.

Each SAR rating links to actions about how a health service should prepare and act to reduce the risks associated with COVID-19 transmission in the community.

As the risk of COVID-19 transmission increases, so will the level of interventions health services will be required to implement, such as increased PPE usage or enhanced patient screening processes.

Different parts of the state and individual health services are likely to be at different risk levels at a point in time based on their geographical area in relation to COVID-19 case locations.

If the risk is very low, there will be minimal impacts to health services and normal service provision will continue uninterrupted.

In areas where the risk rating is considered high (Red: Widespread transmission, or Black: System at Capacity) a range of actions will be triggered. This includes increased use of personal protective equipment (PPE), telehealth, restrictions to hospital visitors or the reduction of elective surgeries to respond to the growing demand on the system.

How will it be implemented?

WA Health Chief Health Officer (CHO) will determine the alert level for a geographical area or region, or for the state, based on a set of defined indicators and thresholds for the 4 levels of risk.

Changes of COVID-19 risk in the community will be discussed by Department of Health COVID-19 health executive to determine whether the risk levels for the state, region or an individual health service need to be changed.

If a risk level changes, the Department of Health will communicate this decision to the relevant health service provider executives to enact and communicate to staff. The SAR will also be updated.
The Department of Health will continue to monitor the risk ratings at the state, region and health service level, to ensure appropriate alert levels are allocated and will circulate detailed information regarding the responses and actions required at each level to support the implementation of any required change.

The Department of Health will continue to revise the SAR in line with emerging state, national and international best practice and evidence.

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<th>Version</th>
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