



People at Risk for Serious illness from COVID-19:

Information for Dialysis Patients

Developed 19 March 2020

As you may be aware COVID-19 or Coronavirus is increasing in our state. While we continue to learn more about COVID-19 each day, it is believed that patients with chronic kidney disease including those receiving dialysis treatment 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 have chronic kidney disease are at greater risk of getting infections but there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce this risk.

PREVENTION

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. This also applies when entering and leaving the dialysis units.

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 metre distance between yourself and others. If you are travelling to dialysis this may mean sitting in the back of the car away from the driver. If travelling on public transport, choose a quiet area.

If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, you must self-isolate. When travelling for your dialysis treatment, you must notify anyone who will be assisting you with transport in advance. You should travel wearing a mask.

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 not visit if they are displaying any symptoms of illness such as fever, coughing, sneezing, headache, etc.

At home if you are unwell or are diagnosed with COVID-19 protect yourselves by following strict isolation guidelines (available in a separate leaflet).

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. Use alcohol-based hand rub immediately after leaving any public environment.

AVOID ALL NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL including plane trips and especially avoid embarking on [cruise ships](#). Planned trips to other dialysis units (within WA or elsewhere in Australia) are likely to be cancelled in the short-term.

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.

DETECTING AND MANAGING

WHO IS AT RISK OF HAVING COVID-19 INFECTION

People currently considered to be at risk of having 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) please contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line 1800 020 080 and your GP as a first step. Appropriate screening for coronavirus will be organised through these services, but you should highlight that you are a dialysis patient. For the safety of other patients, please **also ring the dialysis unit** to discuss your options for dialysis **before** attending your scheduled treatment. We may have to reschedule your appointments but you will still get dialysis. Your dialysis will need to be done in isolation.
2. If you develop fevers $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$ **for 30min** or experience difficulty breathing, you should present to the emergency department. PLEASE NOTE: You should phone ahead so appropriate triage can be organised.
3. If you are very unwell you should call an ambulance and organise immediate transfer to the emergency department as you usually would.

Most dialysis patients in this situation will be unwell for a reason other than COVID-19. However, we are putting precautions in place until COVID-19 is excluded. Please understand that this may result in changes to how you are managed, but it is done with the safety of all patients in mind.

How will dialysis units care for patients who are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19?

The situation is evolving rapidly. As of 20 March 2020, the department of health are putting plans in place to ensure that:

If you have confirmed COVID-19 and are reasonably well, you will receive dialysis as close to home as possible. However this may not be in your usual dialysis unit. You will need to be cared for in an isolation room or special area and some dialysis units may not have sufficient isolation areas to provide dialysis for all the confirmed COVID-19 dialysis patients. You may then be asked to travel to another dialysis unit for your dialysis treatment. This also means that if you are well, you may have to change dialysis unit or dialysis appointments to ensure everyone receives dialysis in a safe environment with the least risk of spreading COVID-19. If you are on home dialysis you can continue to dialyse at home unless you need hospital admission.

If COVID-19 positive you will need to ask your nurses for advice about travelling safely to and from dialysis. At home you will need to be in isolation and your nurses can also provide information about how to isolate.

If you have COVID-19 and are very unwell you will be admitted to a major hospital and attend dialysis there.

We acknowledge the inconvenience these changes may cause to your usual dialysis times and general activities and we do appreciate your cooperation in advance.

WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR YOUR DIALYSIS/MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

IF I'M CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH KIDNEY DISEASE, 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 but if you have symptoms a face mask is useful. Try and organise alternative care/carers if you are unwell.
- Clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Follow the distancing information in this leaflet.
- **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.

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>

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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