

# COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

## Information for patients who are immuno-suppressed or receiving active cancer treatment

### **Am I at greater risk of contracting COVID-19?**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of a common virus. We are still learning how it works. The risk of catching COVID-19 in Australia remains low to moderate, but this may change in future.

It is still not known for sure which groups are most at risk of complications (i.e. more likely to be very unwell) if they catch COVID-19, but it is likely you are more at risk if you catch the virus and:

- You are 65 years of age and over
- You have a long-term medical condition – for example, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, or liver disease.

If you are undergoing active cancer treatment or are otherwise immuno-suppressed, you are at greater risk of becoming infected. If you do become infected, you are also at greater risk of developing a serious complication such as pneumonia.

Not all cancer treatments will compromise the immune system. Your cancer doctor will tell you if you are at risk of immune compromise with your treatment. This immune inhibition is usually short-lived and normal immunity recovers after several weeks.

### **What if you are immuno-suppressed or receiving active cancer treatment and develop symptoms?**

The symptoms of this virus include fever, sore throat, cough and breathing difficulties. It is sometimes like the common cold or flu. If you have symptoms you are worried about, contact your GP, local emergency department or cancer clinic without delay.

Do not go to a clinic without calling first. Avoid contact with other people by self-isolating until you receive advice from a doctor. If it is an emergency, phone 000.

You are not considered at high risk of having COVID-19 if you have:

- **not** been in contact with someone who has travelled overseas; or
- had close contact with someone who has a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19; or
- attended a health centre/hospital where patients with COVID-19 were being treated.

## **Should I still come to hospital for treatment?**

Yes. You should continue to attend your scheduled medical care unless we tell you not to. It's very natural to have concerns when you're being treated for a serious illness. If you are concerned, contact your healthcare team. Every day our major hospitals handle cases of people who have infections that could be passed to other patients. There are many different ways to monitor infection risk and protect you from infection while you are receiving treatment.

## **What can I do to reduce my risk of COVID-19 infection?**

- Regular and thorough hand washing and use of alcohol-based hand washes. Do this when in contact with other people, before eating or touching your face, after using the bathroom or upon entering the home.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the bin straight away and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth. This can transfer the virus from surfaces.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Maintain social distancing when away from home by leaving at least one and a half metres (1.5m) between you and other people. Only leave the house if absolutely necessary.
- Avoid contact with people who have travelled outside of Australia in the past 14 days.
- Don't wear a face mask if you are well
- Get the flu shot (available April). This won't protect you from COVID-19, but it will reduce your risk of getting the flu.

## **Should I self-isolate as a precaution?**

All Australians are now advised to stay at home. You should only leave home if you need to:

- shop for food and essential supplies
- seek medical care
- exercise (no more than 2 people together at once)
- work and study if you can't work or learn from home.

If you are waiting on a test result for COVID-19, you must avoid contact with people. You must self-isolate until your result is negative (clear).

## **Should I take public transport?**

When you are immuno-suppressed, it is recommended to avoid public transport if possible to limit close contact.

### **Want more information?**

There is a large amount of unreliable information circulating on social media. It is important that you seek information on coronavirus from reputable and trusted sources. Visit the Australian Government's Coronavirus Information Page. This page is regularly updated with the latest information: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

You can also visit the Victorian Department of Health website.  
<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

Another trusted source is the World Health Organisation Advice for the Public Page:  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

You can also call the Australian Government's Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. The helpline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **Information is changing quickly. Keep yourself updated daily.**

*Please note this information is intended as general guidance only. Information enclosed in this fact sheet is collated from national and international literature and is subject to change as the situation is evolving rapidly. The information is not intended to replace the individual support of a medical professional. There are many different types of conditions, treatments and complications that reduce immunity. You may require more specialist guidance from a doctor.*