

Practice Connect

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Special Edition

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Coronavirus (COVID-19) General Practice Update

This update comes to you from WA Department of Health, the Australian Medical Association (WA), Royal Australian College of General Practitioners WA and WA Primary Health Alliance.

Going forward, we will be sending you regular updates to keep you informed with the situation regarding COVID-19 changes, to ensure your GPs and practice staff are well informed and prepared.

This information is based on an alert issued by the WA Department of Health on 10 March 2020. More information regarding testing specific to regional Western Australia is to come.

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

Patients who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

Fever
OR

Acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath or cough) with or without fever

AND:

- who have returned from overseas travel within the last 14 days OR
- been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

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What should I do if testing for COVID-19 is required?

- If the patient has mild to moderate symptoms, and you have the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), assess the patient and conduct specimen collection.
- If the patient has mild to moderate symptoms and you are unable to test them, refer for testing to:
 - One of the three COVID Clinics at Royal Perth Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital
 - specimen collection centre (check most up to date list of PathWest specimen collection centres on the PathWest website - <https://pathwest.health.wa.gov.au/Patients/Pages/Collection-Centre-Locations.aspx>)
 - domiciliary pathology service (for patients without transport)
 - emergency department (ED).
- If the patient has severe symptoms suggestive of pneumonia (breathing difficulty, or frequent, severe or productive cough), they should be managed and tested in a hospital in a negative pressure isolation room; phone ahead to the ED to advise.

Refer to [Clinical Alert updates for GPs](#) on WA Department of Health website.

Who doesn't require testing for COVID-19?

Any patient without fever or acute respiratory infection should not be tested for COVID-19.

Patients who are not symptomatic but have:

- been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should self-quarantine for 14 days following last contact.
- been in casual contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should self-monitor for symptoms. These patients should be advised to stay away from vulnerable groups, for example nursing homes.
- returned from mainland China or Iran within the last 14 days should self-quarantine for 14 days from date of leaving.
- left or transited through the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March should self-quarantine for 14 days from date of leaving.

Communicating COVID-19 test results

GPs should advise any patient tested to remain in isolation until results are available. Doctors who order the test are responsible for providing negative results to patients.

Positive results

Positive results for COVID-19 will be communicated to patients by the Department of Health (DoH).

Patients who test positive for COVID-19 will be advised by the DoH to stay in home isolation unless they require hospitalisation. Contact tracing will be undertaken by the WA DoH.

GPs who have tested patients will also be advised of positive results by the DoH.

Negative results

Negative results for COVID-19 for tests conducted in COVID Clinics will be communicated by the DoH.

GPs who have tested patients for COVID-19 will be advised of negative results in the same way as they normally receive them.

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Notification of infectious diseases and related conditions

On 29 January 2020, 'Human coronavirus with pandemic potential' was declared an urgently notifiable disease under Part 9 of the Public Health Act 2016. This includes notification of confirmed cases of Novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV).

Any medical practitioner or nurse practitioner attending a patient whom he/she knows, or suspects has a notifiable infectious disease, or a related condition has a legal obligation to report the diagnosis to the Department of Health WA. Please find the full information [here](#).

COVID Clinics

As part of the ongoing response to preparing for and managing coronavirus (COVID-19), three COVID Clinics, at Royal Perth, Sir Charles Gairdner and Fiona Stanley Hospitals, will be operational from Tuesday 10 March 2020.

The clinics will provide support to people who have symptoms consistent with a potential diagnosis of COVID-19, such as fever or respiratory symptoms.

The WA Health fact sheet below includes guidelines for testing for COVID-19 and what to do if you are unable to test a patient, including referring for testing to a COVID Clinic.

For further information on the COVID-19 Clinics [please click here for the attached flyer](#).

You can still order and reorder surgical masks

One box of 50 surgical masks will be allocated per practice. You can order these at the links below.

For first time requests complete this form: [Surgical mask registrations form](#)

For a repeat order complete this form: [Surgical mask re-order form](#)

Change in guidelines for N95 mask allocation

WA Primary Health Alliance is currently distributing a limited supply of N95 masks to eligible general practices across WA. The guideline for this distribution has been updated by the Australian Government.

General practices are only expected to undertake detailed assessments, if there is no suitable facility for assessment nearby, for example an Emergency Department or COVID clinic.

As such, N95 masks will no longer be distributed to general practices in the metropolitan area, due to their proximity to either an Emergency Department or COVID Clinic to which they can refer a patient for a detailed assessment.

If your practice has already placed an order for N95 masks, your order will be fulfilled.

Due to the limited supply, **eligible** general practices will still only receive two masks at a time – one for the attending health professional and one for the patient.

For further information regarding eligibility to access N95 masks from the DoH [please click here](#).

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Is your practice prepared for COVID-19?

Below are some practical considerations to help you prepare your practice:

- Consider what signage you want to display on the door advising patients how you would like them to proceed if they suspect they are at risk of COVID-19. Visit [HealthPathways WA](#) for links to resources for GPs
- Make sure your workplace is clean and hygienic. Clear unessential objects, like magazines, from surfaces (reception desk, desks and tables)
- Provide sanitising hand rub in prominent places around the practice
- Display posters promoting handwashing
- Identify a room you can use should you need to isolate a suspected case
- Check your stock of cleaning products and clarify the procedure for cleaning the room after use
- Review your practice cleaning schedule and add in regular cleaning of door handles
- Brief all practice staff on your preferred management of cases and messaging for patients
- Have a return to work plan for staff, if they are travelling overseas. This could include them making contact before they return to work for the [latest advice](#)
- Visit [HealthPathways WA](#) for links to the latest Department of Health WA, Australian Government Department of Health and World Health Organization advice
- Identify your closest PathWest testing site, if you don't have the necessary PPE to test patients
- Start to consider contingency and business continuity plans, in the event of an outbreak in your community
- Ensure practice staff know how to don and doff appropriate PPE. This [RACGP poster](#) may be helpful.

Further information

If a patient has any questions about COVID-19, please refer them to the COVID-19 hotline **188 020 080** or <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus>

Practices can contact their WA Primary Health Alliance, Primary Health Liaison, or Practice Assist on **1800 227 747** or practiceassist@wapha.org.au for further assistance.

Department of Health WA has regularly updated information for health professionals which is available here https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus

My Health Record and Coronavirus

Results for Coronavirus tests completed in Western Australia can now be found in the My Health Record once the report has been finalised. These results can be found in the [Pathology Overview Screen](#) within an individual's My Health Record and may be accessed by any healthcare professional with a duty of care, regardless of where the specimen was originally collected.

Currently, unless the individual has requested otherwise, all results will be available for Health Professionals to view. The result will be viewable by the individual within their own My Health Record 7 days after this date.

Please contact the My Health Record Team via myhealthrecord@wapha.org.au if you have any queries or requests for support.

Clinical update: 2020 seasonal influenza vaccines – early advice for vaccination providers

Annual vaccination is the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications and is recommended for all people aged 6 months and over (unless contraindicated).

To meet the anticipated demand for seasonal influenza vaccines in 2020, the Australian Government will be securing the largest supply of seasonal influenza vaccines ever through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for people most at risk. NIP vaccines will be available in April, subject to local supply arrangements.

Updates for 2020

- All people aged 6 months to less than 5 years will now be eligible for free influenza vaccines under the NIP in 2020.
- This year Australia is the first country to offer an adjuvanted Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV), Fludax® Quad, for people aged 65 years and over.
- New age-specific vaccines will be available under the NIP in 2020 for eligible people, and age indications for some vaccines have changed.
- Refer to the [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation's Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2020](#) for up-to-date clinical advice on the age-specific QIVs available under the NIP, strains included in 2020 vaccines, timing of vaccination, and other relevant topics.

Eligibility for influenza vaccines through the National Immunisation Program

In 2020, influenza vaccines funded through the NIP are available to the following groups due to their increased risk of complications from influenza:

- All people aged 6 months to less than 5 years (this cohort is newly eligible in 2020)
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- Pregnant women (during any stage of pregnancy)
- All people aged 65 years and over
- People aged six months and over with medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications.

Timing of vaccination

Optimal protection against influenza occurs within the first three to four months following vaccination. Timing of vaccination should aim to achieve the highest level of protection during peak influenza season. This usually occurs from June to September in most parts of Australia. Vaccinating from April provides protection before the peak season.

Further information and resources about 2020 seasonal influenza vaccines will be made available shortly.

HealthPathways: newly localised pathways

The HealthPathways team have now localised 558 pathways. The most recently localised pathways are:

- Care After Kidney Transplant
- Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)
- Advanced CKD - Symptom Management
- Non-acute Nephrology Assessment (seen within 30 days to 1 year)
- Acute Nephrology Assessment (seen within 7 days)
- Nephrology Advice
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

To access HealthPathways please contact your WAPHA Primary Health Liaison or email the HealthPathways team at healthpathways@wapha.org.au.

'Get the Facts' – launch of the 2020 Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign

The Australian Government Department of Health have launched the next phase of the Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign — 'Get the Facts' — to encourage Australian parents and carers to get their kids vaccinated.

The campaign focuses on:

- the importance of vaccinating on time
- the protection vaccination provides
- addressing concerns around vaccine safety

National and state childhood immunisation coverage rates are close to our target of 95% for children at 5 years of age. However, there are still areas with lower coverage and some children are receiving their vaccinations later than recommended.

Skipping or delaying vaccinations puts children and those around them at risk of catching serious diseases. It's important that children receive their vaccine on time, every time, for the best protection. The 8-week campaign will run nationally on television for the first time, supported by a range of online channels.

Practices can download posters, brochures and videos from the Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign website.

To find out more, please visit the ['Get the Facts' campaign website](#).

How to manage delegations in HPOS

General practitioners can nominate other staff, including practice nurses, managers and staff to do tasks on their behalf in HPOS. This includes delegating access to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Following approval, delegates can act on a provider's behalf for a maximum of 12 months. Providers will need to renew all delegations after either the default 12-month period or for the period less than 12 months that they set up.

Details on how GPs can delegate access and how staff can request access from the GP is detailed on the [Services Australia website](#).

Health promotion events

Coeliac Awareness Week is March 13 to 20

It's time to get serious about coeliac disease diagnosis!

Over 355,000 Australians have coeliac disease. That's approximately 1 in 70 Australians, HOWEVER 80% don't know they have it. Some people may have many symptoms and others have few.

Coeliac Awareness Week (CAW) 2020 aims to raise awareness about coeliac disease and the need for it to be treated seriously.

While awareness of coeliac disease in the general community is growing, there is little understanding of the varied symptoms people can experience before seeking a diagnosis.

The new campaign highlights the range of possible symptoms beyond the typical 'gut' issues and encourages all undiagnosed people - particularly those at risk of coeliac disease - to take our online self-assessment at www.coeliac.org.au/assess.

Coeliac Australia is working to raise the profile of coeliac disease with medical professionals and the broader community.

We have a huge job ahead to improve Australia's low diagnosis rate and encourage a staggering 284,000 people to seek a diagnosis and ultimately - feel better!

How you can help:

- Encourage your family, friends, colleagues to take our quick online assessment to see if they may be part of the 80% undiagnosed www.coeliac.org.au/assess
- Follow our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages and share our awareness posts
- [Download the campaign poster](#)

Coming up soon...	
World Kidney Day	March 12
World's Greatest Shave	March 13
Brain Awareness Week	16-22 March
World Down Syndrome Day	March 21
Harmony Day	March 21

Education and training

Visit our Webinars & Workshops page at www.practiceassist.com.au for the events calendar.

Live Forum: AAPM Member Forum on COVID-19
Presented by Australian Association of Practice Management
Wednesday 18 March

Ways of Working with Grief and Loss in Aboriginal Communities
Presented by Palliative and Supportive Care Education, Cancer Council of WA
Thursday 19 March

Chronic Disease Support Program
Presented by The Benchmark Group
Friday 20 March

RACGP Practice Owners National Conference
Presented by RACGP
Saturday 16 & Sunday 17 May

The Cutting Edge: Practice Nurse Skills Training Workshop
Presented by Clinical Training & Evaluation Centre (CTEC)
Saturday 6 June

AAPM National Conference: 2020 Practice Management In Focus
Presented by Australian Association of Practice Management
Save the date October 20 to 23