What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can cause illnesses similar to the common cold, but it can also cause more serious respiratory disease. At this stage, most people in our local community displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, tiredness or shortness of breath are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness, not coronavirus. However, the threats posed by the virus means serious steps must be taken to stop the spread of the disease in the coming weeks.

How does the coronavirus spread?

The coronavirus is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- Direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection when they cough or sneeze, or
- Touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then immediately touching your mouth or face.

What do I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms (fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness or shortness of breath) within 14 days of returning from overseas, or within 14 days of last contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, you should arrange to see your doctor for urgent assessment. You should telephone your GP clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your travel history or that you may have been in contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus. You must remain isolated either in your home or a healthcare setting until public health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities. If you are unwell but unsure if you need testing for coronavirus, you can call the Department of Health & Human Services coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398.

Who is most at risk of a serious illness?

Some people who are infected may not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may quickly become very ill. The people at most risk of serious infection are:

- People with weakened immune systems (e.g. on immunosuppression medication)
- Elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as they have higher rates of chronic illness
- People with diagnosed chronic medical conditions
- People in group residential settings such as aged care homes

Important information for Renal Dialysis patients

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, but we remain focused on continuing high-quality care in a safe manner for our dialysis patients.

To keep you and your healthcare workers safe, we have implemented strategies to reduce face-to-face and hospital interactions, and thereby reduce the risk of viral transmission to our dialysis patients and our staff.

Because our dialysis staff are highly and specially trained, we need to also safeguard their health and safety, as this will ensure their continued ability to provide safe dialysis for you.

We have prepared some advice regarding your regular dialysis, how to remain well during the pandemic (limiting viral spread, prompt flu vaccination) and some basic information about the coronavirus COVID-19.

We are especially keen to emphasize the importance of:

1. Attending your **regular dialysis** sessions.
2. Taking your **medications regularly**. Ensure that you have sufficient supply.
3. Adhering to **fluid restrictions strictly**, as you want to avoid hospital presentations, extra dialysis sessions and admissions due to fluid overload.
4. Having a safe way to get to and from your dialysis appointments. Driving your own car or being in a car driven by a household member/friend is ideal. If you need to take a car service such as a taxi, sit in the back. If you need to take public transport, try to sit at last a metre away from others. Always avoid touching your face when using public transport or car services, and clean your hands at the earliest opportunity on exiting.

Your ongoing diligence in these areas will mean avoiding preventable complications and unnecessary hospital visits and/or admissions. We are working hard to maintain a safe environment for your dialysis to continue.

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, staff health may be impacted and it may become necessary to make adjustments to your dialysis scheduling and treatment length in order to ensure ongoing dialysis for all patients.

It is possible some people may be asked to dialyse for a time in a different satellite centre than their usual site.
COVID-19: Your Care

Changes to the actual dialysis provided will only be made under the supervision and approval of the Renal Senior Medical Specialists.

Do not present to your dialysis clinic if you feel unwell.

If you do become unwell at home, communicate with dialysis staff by telephone.

This is extremely important, so ask for and record contact details of your dialysis centre, so you are able to call if you feel unwell. We will be able to advise you over the phone and in this way, make a plan for your dialysis whilst coordinating your overall care.

Do not attend the hospital or ward for routine scripts

Where we can, we will post medications prescriptions to your home address. Allow ample time for this and advise us early if you are running low on medications.

Influenza and Pneumococcal Vaccinations:

The Alfred Renal Department strongly recommends influenza vaccination to protect you in the coming winter flu season. The flu vaccination will not protect you against COVID-19.

At this stage, the flu vaccination is likely to be available in April.

Additionally, if you have not had the pneumococcal vaccine within the last 5 years, you may wish to discuss this with your GP.

Make an appointment with your GP to have your vaccinations.

Changes to your Outpatient Clinic Appointments:

Your Renal Clinic appointments will be changed to Telehealth, or a telephone consultation.

This is to minimize your exposure and unnecessary hospital visits, allowing you to stay in your own environment. Let your doctor or dialysis nurse know if you have any pending investigations or procedures at the Alfred, Caulfield and Sandringham Hospital, and this will be assessed on a case by case basis.
Telehealth

Patients will require telehealth access via the internet. You can find more information here: https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/services/telehealth

In the event that you cannot access telehealth, we can also carry out reviews via telephone call alone.

What is required for Telehealth Appointment?

Prior to your Telehealth appointment, make sure the following has been done:

· Make sure that you access your telehealth login prior to your appointment (to allow time to troubleshoot / address any issues).

· Have a list of your medications ready and the scripts that you require.

During this challenging period, the Alfred Renal Team is committed to supporting you. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Importantly, be kind, and compassionate to one another. We are all in this together. Therefore, it is our responsibility as community to keep one another safe.

Thank you,

Your dialysis team.

Sandringham Dialysis 90761419
Caulfield Dialysis  9076 6195
Alfred Dialysis Unit 9076 2926