



Dialysis and COVID-19: Risks and Information

This advice takes effect upon the cessation of the State of Emergency in Western Australia which was enabled due to the COVID-19 pandemic through s56 of the Emergency Management Act 2005 (WA) on 16 March 2020 and s167 of the Public Health Act 2016 on 17 March 2020.

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses that can cause illnesses ranging from a mild common cold to severe disease such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was identified in December 2019 and is caused by the SARS CoV-2 (SARS CoV-2).

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.

Although people who have chronic kidney disease may be at greater risk of getting infections there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce this risk.

Prevention

CLEAN YOUR HANDS REGULARLY. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and then dry hands with paper towel or a clean hand towel. Alternatively use an alcohol-based hand rub. 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 unit. You should also ask visitors to your home to clean their hands

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 physical distancing outside of your home by leaving at least a 1.5 metre distance between yourself and others where possible. 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. Consider wearing a mask whenever you cannot physically distance.

If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, it is recommended that **you self-isolate** and follow public health instructions. Contact the dialysis unit to advise you have COVID-19 and for current advice about the local COVID-19 safe transport options when travelling for your dialysis treatment. You must notify anyone who will be assisting you with transport in advance. It is recommended that you wear a mask when travelling.

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. Request that family/friends do not visit if they are displaying any symptoms of illness such as fever, coughing, sneezing, headache, etc.

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 you have to be in a crowd, it is recommended that you wear a mask. Use alcohol-based hand rub immediately after leaving any public environment.

VACCINATION is strongly recommended for anyone with kidney disease. Vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of severe disease and death. You are currently eligible for three primary doses and two winter booster doses of vaccine. Up to date information regarding COVID-19 vaccines is available on the government websites or you can talk to any of your health professionals or GP if you have any concerns.

Detection and Management

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/or loss of taste or smell. Other non-specific symptoms of COVID-19 include new symptoms of fatigue, headache, runny nose, acute blocked nose (congestion), muscle pain, joint pain, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite.

People who are classified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case are also at higher risk of COVID-19 infection. Please see the [COVID-19 CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units](#) for an up-to-date definition of a close contact.

What do I do if I become unwell?

1. **For the safety of other patients, please ring the dialysis unit to discuss your options for dialysis before attending your scheduled treatment.**
2. If you are mildly unwell, have viral symptoms (e.g. fever and cough) please contact your GP. Highlight that you are a dialysis patient. You may be asked to get a COVID-19 test (rapid antigen test (RAT or PCR)). We may have to reschedule your appointments but you will still get dialysis. Your dialysis will need to be done in isolation.
3. If you develop **fevers >38°C** or experience difficulty breathing, you should present to the emergency department. Wear a mask if you can tolerate one. PLEASE NOTE: You should phone ahead so appropriate triage can be organised.
4. 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 who have symptoms 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.

If you are diagnosed with COVID-19 you may be eligible for antiviral treatments to reduce the symptoms of the COVID-19 infection. Your renal doctor will review if this is appropriate for you.

How will dialysis units care for patients who are COVID-19 positive, symptomatic or close contacts?

WA has transitioned safely to a living with COVID environment however still wishes to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the dialysis unit.

If you are being tested for COVID-19 or have tested positive, please inform your usual dialysis unit immediately.

If you are identified as being at risk of having COVID-19, you may be asked to show a negative PCR test result or have a RAT on arrival at the dialysis unit.

If you are confirmed to have 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. Occasionally your dialysis may need to be delayed for a day.

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

If you are a close COVID-19 contact you may also be asked to change your dialysis schedule and be isolated during dialysis. You should be able to stay in your usual dialysis unit. **Please notify your dialysis unit before treatment if you have been identified as a close contact prior to your scheduled appointment.**

Masks may be used in the dialysis units, depending on rates of community transition. Please comply with a request to wear a mask.

We acknowledge the inconvenience these changes may cause to your usual dialysis times and general activities and 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.
- You may need to wear a mask.
- Visitors may be restricted in dialysis units.
- Before every visit please consider if you have had contact with persons with, or suspected of, having COVID-19 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 and follow with hand hygiene. Consider wearing a mask if unwell. 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 physical distancing information in this leaflet.

If you suspect you may have symptoms of COVID-19 or have had close contact with a person who has COVID-19, you should be tested. Refer to the [HealthyWA COVID-19 testing website](#) for further advice.

Further information for people who are immunocompromised is available on the [HealthyWA People at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 website](#).

For the latest information please visit: <https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/COVID19>

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

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