



## COVID-19 (coronavirus) update – 22 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, I would like to update you on the following topics:

- New measures to reduce COVID-19 spread
- Change to testing criteria

### **New measures to reduce COVID-19 spread**

If you have been following the news over the weekend, you will have heard about the new measures being introduced by State Governments across the country to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Australians are being urged to limit non-essential domestic travel (by any means) with many States requiring incoming travellers to go into self-quarantine on arrival. Many other measures including ceasing all non-essential activities over the coming days are in train – including restriction to and closures of restaurants, cafés, bars, gyms, schools and more.

In Queensland, today at 12:20, the Premier and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services approved the declaration of a Disaster Situation under S69 of the Disaster Management Act 2003. This is an important prelude to sweeping changes to be enacted within Queensland over the coming hours and days.

It is important to remember that these measures are designed to keep us safe and protect our community both now and into the future, so please take them seriously and remember to identify your support mechanisms now, so that we can get through this together.

In health, this enables us to further implement our plans for COVID-19. The Director General of Queensland Health has today initiated major changes in focus and support of the Executive Leadership Team with a critical focus on maximising the capacity of our health system to respond effectively. Metro North will remain networked with the higher level actions to ensure our implementation is fully supported, agile and responsive.

Our current efforts are on refocussing our healthcare system on supporting the growth in COVID-19 cases and managing the impact on our other HHS services. We are implementing a shift of focus away from routine and lesser clinically urgent work to ensuring we can maintain appropriate response to urgent and emergency care needs of all of our patients – non COVID-19 and COVID-19. Where possible we are expanding our

capacity through maximising use of alternative providers and/or alternative healthcare delivery pathways (e.g. virtual consultation). We are also judiciously reducing other services, such as aerosol generating dental procedures, non-urgent (category 3) elective surgery and non-urgent (category 6) gastrointestinal scopes.

### **Change to testing criteria**

Over the weekend there were changes made to the testing criteria for COVID-19 in Australia, with a change in 'fever' threshold to 38 degrees or higher. There was also some changes to 'recovery' criteria.

Clinical suspicion and criteria for COVID-19 testing currently includes:

- Any person who has travelled overseas within the 14 days before the onset of fever ( $\geq 38$  degrees Celsius) or history of fever (e.g. night sweat or chills) or acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat) with or without fever;
- Any person with close contact in 14 days before illness onset with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and who are now exhibiting fever ( $\geq 38$  degrees Celsius) or history of fever (e.g. night sweat or chills) or acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat) with or without fever;
- Any person with severe community-acquired pneumonia requiring admission, and no other cause identified, with or without recent international travel; and
- Any healthcare worker with direct patient contact with a fever ( $\geq 38$  degrees Celsius) or history of fever (e.g. night sweat or chills) AND acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat).

Over the coming days and weeks of changes in our health system and community, please remember to look after yourself and your family, friends and colleagues. Our people are a precious resource and each and every one of you is important!!! I love hearing your stories and sharing experiences every day.

[Benestar](#), our Employee Assistance Provider is available 24/7 by phoning **1300 360 364** to provide support and we will also be putting a range of local initiatives in place to ensure we have, and maintain a focus on healthcare worker wellbeing.

As professionals on the frontline of responding to COVID-19, you should be so proud of the work you are doing. I know many of you are working hard to ensure we are prepared and ready and I want you to know how grateful I am for your ongoing commitment.

Queenslanders need us at this time to be level headed, focussed and at the top of our game. Keep up the good work.

Kind regards,

**Dr Liz Rushbrook**