

Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)

Elective surgery and outpatient clinics

Interim guidance for health services

Interim Guidance Updated 4 March 2020

Version 5

1 Context

Public health recommendations have been issued for a number of groups of people related to the risk of COVID-19 infection, as follows:

- People who have been in, or transited through, mainland China or Iran in the last 14 days OR who have been in contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious must self-isolate for 14 days following last contact.
- People who have been in, or transited through Italy or South Korea in the last 14 days have been advised to practice social distancing for 14 days following last contact.
- People who have been in or transited through to a number of other countries ¹ considered at risk of COVID-19 transmission in the previous 14 days have been advised to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.

The following advice regarding elective surgery and outpatient clinics reflect these recommendations.

2 Elective surgery

Onset of COVID-19 during recovery from an operation is likely to complicate recovery and prolong the hospital stay, as well as expose health care workers who would then have to be excluded from healthcare work.

For planned surgery only, staff are required to:

Ask patients at the time of booking confirmation if they have:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Been in or transited through mainland China, Iran, South Korea or Italy in the last 14 days • Been in close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious, during the 14 days before their scheduled surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Been in or transited through any of the following countries in the last 14 days: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cambodia ○ Hong Kong ○ Indonesia ○ Japan ○ Singapore ○ Thailand
<p>For patients who meet the above criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postpone surgery until 14 days after the last contact day if it will not significantly impact patient outcomes – this decision will require discussion with the clinical team • ensure the surgery is re-scheduled as soon as practicable after the 14 day exclusion period has lapsed 	<p>For patients who meet the above criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider postponing surgery until 14 days after the patient departed from the country of interest – this decision will require discussion with the clinical team

Note, if the patient has fever or acute respiratory illness ask that they seek health advice (from their GP or by calling healthdirect on 1800 022 222) to exclude COVID-19 as well as to resolve any other health issues.

1. See: <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-covid-19-countries.htm> As of 2 March 2020, these other countries included Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand.

3 Outpatient clinics

3.1 Before attendance at outpatients

- Develop a system, prior to attendance (e.g. phone call, SMS), to ask patients whether they've been in the above countries or have had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious, in the 14 days before the scheduled outpatient appointment.
- If the patient meets the above criteria:
 - consider alternate of methods of conducting the appointment if appropriate (e.g. telephone or tele-medicine)
 - if it is not possible to conduct the appointment in an alternate way, reschedule their appointment unless it is medically necessary
 - reschedule the appointment for as soon as possible after the 14 day exclusion
 - remind them they are to self-isolate at home for 14 days after they departed mainland China or Iran or if they have had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious
 - remind them they are advised to practice social distancing if they have been in, or transited through Italy and South Korea in the last 14 days.
 - remind them if they develop respiratory symptoms or fever to call healthdirect on 1800 022 222 or call their GP.
- Note, facilities will need to develop a system to implement the above steps, including appointing an appropriate person to assess whether or not it's safe to defer the outpatient appointment.

3.2 During outpatient attendance

- Consider options to identify patients in the outpatient clinic waiting room, e.g.
 - waiting room signage
 - asking patients at reception whether they have been to or transited through mainland China, Iran South Korea or Italy in the last 14 days or have had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious, in the previous 14 days
- For patients who meet the above criteria:
 - ask the patient to wear a surgical mask
 - ask the patient if they have any respiratory symptoms or fever.
- For patients who meet the above criteria within 14 days of their appointment and who do not report any respiratory symptoms or fever:
 - the attending doctor should make a clinical assessment about the presence of respiratory symptoms
 - if no symptoms/signs continue the outpatient consultation as normal, with the patient wearing a surgical mask
 - remind the patient that they should self-isolate themselves at home for 14 days after they departed China, or if they have been or transited through Iran in the last 14 days or have had contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 while infectious
 - remind them they are advised to practice social distancing if they have been in, or transited through Italy and South Korea in the last 14 days.
- For patients who meet the above criteria and who report symptoms
 - manage the patient in conjunction with the emergency department as per the clinician guidance: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/default.aspx>
- Other guidance: ensure availability of surgical masks and hand hygiene facilities