

Dear Patients,

Thank you for taking the time to read a message on behalf of our team here at HEMC, regarding coronavirus. We have been monitoring Australian and global event responses to the current pandemic declared by the World Health Organisation.

This coronavirus is a new and emerging disease and as we now see more cases reported, it is clear we will soon confirm increasing community transmission of the virus. What we are also learning, is the potential of serious health consequences especially in vulnerable patient groups.

Whilst it is true that most people will get a mild illness, with fever, cough, lethargy, and sore throat the common symptoms of flu. Many people will need no or minimal treatment and will clear the virus and return to good health. Younger patient groups and children are expected to fall into this category.

However, what is becoming clear is that some patients can go on to develop severe respiratory illness, often needing hospitalisation and some progressing to intensive care support, some resulting in deaths.

Our priority is the health of our patients, staff and our community, we need to take measures to protect everyone, but especially those in vulnerable groups. Some of the vulnerable groups include;

- Older patients, especially above the age of 70.
- People with existing heart or lung conditions, diabetes, high blood pressure or those with impaired immune systems.

To create a safe environment for our patients, we have been working behind the scenes. As the situation is evolving, we will continue to change and adapt to the way we practice whilst keeping abreast of the changing conditions of the outbreak.

You may notice some changes to what we do and how we do them, which currently includes;

- Phone calls prior to your appointment to ask some screening questions about your risk of having the virus (updated daily according to current state guidelines)
- separating those with symptoms of possible coronavirus to be seen in our specific area of our regular practice (patients will be advised if this is applicable to them)
- wearing masks (both doctor and patient) if someone has symptoms of coronavirus
- offering phone consultations
- offering telehealth (video) consultations

The government is supporting phone and video consultations for some vulnerable groups via the provision of an MBS rebate, the groups are

- People 70 and above
- People with confirmed coronavirus or those who are quarantined with coronavirus or under the one year old
- Pregnant women
- If you have a chronic health condition
- Anyone who is immunosuppressed
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients over 50

Telephone and Video consultations are still available outside of the above groups, however you will not be eligible for a Medicare rebate, an out of pocket fee will incur.

We ask you as a member of our practice community to please help us limit the spread of this illness. Please inform our staff if you have had symptoms or had contact with a confirmed or suspected coronavirus case. We will then be able to assess where we can most safely see and treat you. It may be over the phone or video consultation, or if we need to examine you it will be in our separate area which has a different entrance. Included in this special clinic are coughs, colds, runny noses, flu like symptoms and return to work clearances.

We are facing what may be a difficult time ahead and ask that people with symptoms or known contacts to consider the implications to others within the practice and out in the community. If you are not in the low risk category we ask that you think of family members or friends who may be at risk. It is known that self-isolation and social distancing will limit the spread and the impact of coronavirus.

The testing for coronavirus is changing daily according to state guidelines. Today it is limited to those at highest risk (which at present are returned travellers/ or contacts of confirmed cases/ or health care workers). This means that there may be more cases in the community that are not being diagnosed. Testing is limited to a few centres we are unsure when testing will be expanded.

Health E Medical and Allied services group is staffed and fully functioning this week, we review the state and national guidelines daily, we keep informed of the latest developments from overseas, and we communicate all new developments multiple times a day. If you would like further discuss coronavirus any of our GPs are happy to consult via phone/ video or within regular consultations. As part of our extra service, we have more nurses available for triage calls.

If you are at risk it may be time to consider limiting avoidable interactions, unfortunately even when showing no symptoms the virus can be transmitted. Consider social distancing, working from home and avoiding gatherings these will be important measures to protect yourself. Please follow the government advice)

Please stay safe and healthy, we look forward to looking after you and all of our patients, you are part of our family and community. Thank you again for trusting your health care to the team at Health e Medical centre.

With many thanks and kind Regards,

Dr Michael Carroll  
Practice Principal  
Health e Medical Centre

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Health e Medical Centre