

MESSAGE FROM THE PAEDIATRIC CF TEAM JOHN HUNTER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Appropriately there is a lot of concern regarding coronavirus [COVID-19] and its impact on both our CF patients and families, as well as the wider community.

As a clinic we are here to support you through this pandemic and aim to provide the best advice available and care in an ever changing environment.

In Australia (and even around the world) we are at the early stages of the outbreak, leading to a lot of uncertainty in an area where we are used to having most of the answers, based on a combination of clinical experience and evidence from trials and around the World.

New developments and changes to advice are occurring at a greater frequency than daily!

The most up to date recommendations can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health dedicated COVID-19 web page – accessed via the below link and we would encourage all families to review this.

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

We do not have any evidence of the effect of COVID-19 on people with CF (as there are currently no reported cases) and if acquired the response is likely to be as varied as the underlying condition. For most people (both with and without CF) this may be a mild illness, manifesting as what most people would describe as a “common cold”. This is partly why the virus is spreading so quickly as most people traditionally with a mild sore throat, runny nose or low grade fever would continue to attend school, work and other social activities.

The current evidence is that children appear to be less at risk from this virus than adults, but again we are completely unsure in the CF population.

Our recommendations are in line with both the NSW and Australian Government, but we also recognise that you need to manage your own day to day life as you feel is most appropriate for your situation. We do urge you to continue your usual infection control practices but to be even more vigilant around your family, friends, and school mates.

In most cases your school and social group will be aware of your underlying medical condition and need to be made aware of the risk they pose to you (as well as others with underlying medical illnesses) if they expose you to their symptoms.

Based on the current advice available we would recommend –

- Focus on good hand hygiene with hand sanitiser, frequent hand washing with soap and water and wiping down of frequently touched surfaces.
- Practice appropriate cough etiquette and wash / gel your hands following
- Social distancing - avoid non-essential social gatherings particularly if large numbers of people are involved, do not attend school excursions or assemblies (which should have been cancelled by schools)
- Cancellation any non-essential travel plans.
- If you have family members/friends /social contacts who have recently returned from overseas in the last two weeks stay away from them especially if they are unwell.

- PLEASE remain diligent with ALL of your prescribed home treatments to keep you in your best possible health.
- If someone is experiencing an exacerbation please contact the team and we follow the normal channels regarding treatment.

AND THE BIG QUESTION LAST – school attendance.

- We are aware this is a hugely controversial and emotive area and can only recommend you consider your child's attendance at school on an individualised basis.
- In NSW, in line with the current national advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the Department of Education advises against pre-emptive school closures.
- It also however also advises consideration be given to staying away if your child has a "chronic condition"
- We are aware some schools have been asking children not to attend
- We are also aware that many schools may move their student's education to an entirely on-line platform in the near future, which may not be an available option for all schools across our health district.

Currently we are not recommending parents routinely remove their children from school as the economic and social impacts for families can be considerable, and we have no good evidence that doing this reduces the risk of COVID -19 infection or indeed, reduces the rate of infection in children, but encourage you to make the decision based on your individual child, family, school situation.

Dr Jodi Hilton

Senior Staff Specialist Paediatric Respiratory & Sleep Medicine, Director Cystic Fibrosis Clinic

On Behalf of the Paediatric Cystic Fibrosis Team

John Hunter Children's Hospital