

COVID-19 guidance for children and young people with cancer and haematological disorders undergoing treatment at Sydney Children's Hospital

This advice is current as of Thursday 12th August 2021. However with the evolving coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, advice may change. Please visit the NSW Health, the Australian Government Department of Health and the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network websites for regular updates.

NSW Health: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.au/>

Sydney Children's Hospitals Network: <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/covid-19-information>

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. Firstly, we want to acknowledge how difficult the current situation is for you and your family. The Kids Cancer Centre is here to treat your child and to help you navigate through the health system to provide care and support for your family. Our primary aim and priority is safe delivery of your child's medical care.

There is currently community transmission of COVID-19 in Greater Sydney and parts of NSW. The situation in NSW, ACT and the rest of Australia is constantly evolving. The purpose of this information is to provide you with guidance where we can. There will be an additional advice provided specific to patients attending the hospital sent by your Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC) or medical team if you have a planned admission or appointment.

What is coronavirus and COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses known to cause respiratory infections. The disease caused by the virus is named COVID-19. The current variant of concern is the Delta variant.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of COVID-19 include flu-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat, cough, or shortness of breath. The Delta variant is reported to cause diarrhoea.

Is there a treatment available?

There is no specific treatment for coronaviruses. Most symptoms can be treated with supportive medical care.

How might coronavirus affect my child who is undergoing treatment?

The current evidence shows that the infection is milder in children than in adults. Children may have a reduced ability to spread the disease although this is unknown for the current Delta variant.

Children and young people undergoing cancer treatment have a weakened immune system, which may make it harder for the body to fight off infections such as COVID-19. However, countries that have had very high rates of COVID-19 did not see many severe infections in children with cancer. We have not had any cases in Kids Cancer Centre patients at Sydney Children's Hospital.

What should I do if my child develops a fever or any other symptoms?

Your child should present to hospital if they have:

1. Fever ≥ 38 degrees as per usual practice for patients on treatment
2. Fever ≥ 37.5 degrees PLUS a new cough, sore throat or shortness of breath or new onset diarrhoea

You should follow the normal guidance for attending hospital if your child develops a fever. Do not delay coming into the emergency department.

What happens if my child has a planned appointment?

Our aim is to deliver care as planned without interruptions. If you need to visit the hospital for a planned admission or appointment your Clinical Nurse Consultant or a member of the KCC clerical staff will review the current requirements with you before you come. Every person entering the hospital is currently being screened with a short questionnaire and will have their temperature checked.

Parents and carers **must not** enter the hospital if you:

- have ANY symptoms such as a fever, runny nose, sore throat, or cough, OR
- have been in contact with anyone who has COVID-19 in the last 14 days, OR
- have been notified to isolate by NSW health
- If you have been identified as a close contact by NSW health

Families who live within areas of heightened COVID concern may require isolation on arrival but can enter the hospital. There may be additional screening and covid-19 testing requirements. These will be discussed prior to your appointment. These requirements change and we ask for families to be flexible.

If you do need to get tested, we encourage you to use drive through facilities where possible. Please check the eligibility prior to joining the queue as some do not test children less than 5 years.

Do I need to wear a mask?

In line with advice from NSW Health, all staff, patients and visitors over the age of 12 years will need to wear a mask inside our hospitals at all times except while eating or drinking. This includes patients and carers. This includes at the bedside if you are in a bay with more than one patient. Patients may remove their mask during treatment and when in their bed.

What are the temporary visitor guidelines?

To keep your child and other patients and staff safe we need to reduce the number of people coming into the hospital. This means that visitors are not allowed at this time. This includes siblings and grandparents. Due to the increase in COVID-19 community transmission, we request that only one parent/carer accompany/visit a patient at a time. Visitor guidelines are updated by the hospital frequently, you are able to discuss this with your CNC.

We know that this will have an impact on you, your child, their siblings and your extended care network. We know that facetime and zoom are a poor substitute. However we need to maintain these restrictions to ensure we keep everyone safe. As soon as it is safe to do so we will let you know that the rules on visitors and siblings have changed. If you have an individual situation that you would like to discuss please raise this with your treating team.

What if there are patients with suspected coronavirus in our hospital? Will they pose a risk to my child?

Ensuring our hospital is a safe and welcoming space for patients and families is our priority. We are taking the following precautions to help keep everyone safe:

- All families with planned appointments are being contacted and screened prior to their appointment to make sure no one is at risk when they come to hospital.
- All suspected cases of COVID-19 will be isolated to ensure the safety of other patients, staff and visitors to the Hospital.
- Patients and their carers entering the hospital are being screened at all entry points, and must wear masks within the hospital.

What about Staff?

The best way we can keep your child safe is to have healthy staff. This means all staff you see will be wearing a mask. Depending on where you are in the hospital staff may also wear a face shield or goggles, a gown and gloves. These protective equipment items keep your child safe and prevent transmission between staff members. We test any staff who meet the criteria provided by NSW health including those living in any area of concern. To help adhere to essential physical distancing guidelines, we have also asked our staff to limit the number of team members entering wards and clinical areas to the minimum required.

Should we cancel my child's treatment or follow-up appointments at the Hospital?

In general your child should only attend the hospital for urgent care and scheduled treatment. All non-urgent appointments will either be delivered by telehealth or delayed if it is safe to do so. If your child is unwell, you should follow the normal guidance for attending hospital. We will always make sure that any child who needs to be seen will get all the care required to ensure their health and safety.

What about vaccination?

We recommend a vaccination for everyone over the age of 16 years. There are some specific contraindications to the two types of available COVID-19 vaccinations, discuss which vaccination is right for you or your child with your doctor. Vaccination has recently been approved by the TGA for patients aged 12-15 years however we still require further information from the Federal and State governments to understand how and when these vaccines will become available for this age group. The Kids Cancer Centre is monitoring this situation closely and will continue to update you on this. We will notify you when further information is available.

Can my child go to school?

Home learning is in place for Greater Sydney. Our current advice is that all children who are able to stay home should do so, including patients on active treatment. Children and siblings outside of the Greater Sydney area and in the ACT may attend school if they are otherwise determined to be well enough to attend school by the treating team. We know that home learning will have an impact on your child and your family. We have educational support available through a number of channels. If you have further questions or require additional support your CNC can connect you with the relevant team.

What if I have some more questions?

Please speak to your child's medical consultant your clinical nurse consultant (CNC) or any member of your child's healthcare team. The Kids Cancer Centre can be contacted on (02) 9382 1111.

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