

COVID-19: Information for children and adolescents who are immunosuppressed following a heart transplant

What is coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19. Lots of people are concerned about COVID-19 spreading and the impact this could have on the community.

COVID-19 and facts for children

So far, COVID-19 has not been found in many people in the Australian community, but that will change and COVID-19 will become more common. When children do have COVID-19 it is a less severe illness with children experiencing much more mild symptoms than adults and a much smaller proportion need significant care. This is consistent with international experience from China, where the outbreak was severe.

COVID-19 and facts for children on immune suppression medicines

So far there is no evidence from overseas that children or young people taking immunosuppressive medications are at higher risk of becoming very unwell, however common sense would suggest that sensible precautions should be taken. The issues are similar to the annual wave of flu infections.

Currently there is no specific treatment or vaccine for coronavirus.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- Cough.
- Fever.
- Shortness of breath.

However, these symptoms do not necessarily mean you have the illness (and they are similar to lots of other colds and viruses).

Unless you have had close contact with someone known to have the COVID-19 virus, having these symptoms is much more likely to be due to a common cold or flu virus at the moment.

What can you do to protect your child's health?

Good hygiene:

- Wash your hands!
- Do it often - and sing a song for 20 seconds.
- Teach your kids to wash their hands.
- You can use alcohol hand wash, but most of all hand washing with soap and water is very effective.

Cough into your elbow (or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze)
- then wash your hands.

Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth.

Stay home if you are sick:

- If your child is unwell, they should stay home.
- You can ring your GP for advice.
- If you are concerned you or your child has coronavirus, please call ahead before visiting your GP. This is important.
- The Department of Health national coronavirus helpline is 1800 020 080. Call this if you need further advice.
- You can also contact your child's cardiology team for advice if required.

Other steps:

- Get the usual yearly flu vaccine when it becomes available.
- There is no need to stockpile medications as our medications are sourced widely.
- It is sensible to avoid all travel at the moment, and to avoid large groups of people, including public transport and shopping centres.

Should I keep my child off school?

SCHN cardiologists strongly recommend to limit your child's exposure to others, including other children, by not sending any of your children to school this will decrease the risk of getting COVID-19.

Should I stop giving immunosuppression and heart medications to my child?

Please do not stop any heart medications, especially immunosuppression medications.

Changes to your child's medications should only be done after discussion with your cardiologist at the Sydney Children's Hospital Network, or with the transplant team at Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

What about my child's clinic appointments?

All routine clinic appointments have been temporarily cancelled.

Your cardiologist or a member of the team will call for a telephone check-up, and to arrange a follow-up plan. This call will come through as a 'private' or 'withheld' number, please answer the phone.

You will need to give your verbal consent over the phone for these telephone interviews which will be documented into the Hospital's patient records system.

Special arrangements will be made for patients needing urgent medical attention, and this is guided by your child's cardiologist.

What can I do to stay emotionally healthy?

COVID-19 has caused feelings of uncertainty and stress for many people in our community. We understand that children and families affected by childhood heart disease may be feeling particularly worried or anxious during this difficult time. There is support available for you and your family.

The SCHN Cardiac Service, including The Heart Centre for Children has a team of psychologists, who are dedicated to supporting children with heart disease and their families. If you would like to talk to a member of our support team, please call us on (02) 9845 0088 (Mon-Fri: 9am-5pm). Please leave a message and we will return your call. This is a free service available to all children and families affected by childhood heart disease in NSW.

There are also simple things you can do to look after your and your family's emotional health. The Heart Centre for Children website has a detailed information sheet on ways of coping with stress related to COVID-19, including tips for talking with children about the virus and links to useful emotional health resources.

Please do not come to the Heart Centre for Children if your child has the typical symptoms of a cold or flu (cough, fever, runny nose)

It is sensible to keep up to date with information about coronavirus from the Department of

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

Source: General information and local advice; Royal Children's Hospital, Victoria