

Covid-19 and ArthritisCARE

With COVID-19 now declared a global pandemic, ArthritisCARE will continue to monitor and implement all necessary Government recommendations and do our best in providing a high standard of care to our patients & their families and a safe workplace for our staff & their families.

For patients that have an upcoming appointment, if you have a fever, cough, sore throat or flu like symptoms OR have travelled overseas in the last 14 days OR have had close contact with someone diagnosed with or suspected of having coronavirus in the last 14 days, please contact the Clinic direct.

Likewise, all our staff will follow the same guidelines to ensure our patients and work colleagues are as safe as possible.

Safety is our number one priority

Wherever possible we would prefer to review patients via Telehealth consultation. However, if this is not an option for you at this stage we are still open for regular consultations also. If you are coming onsite for your review or initial consult, please ensure you are not experiencing one of the following symptoms or you may be asked to postpone your appointment on arrival.

- High temperature
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath

As advocates of the Australian Medical Association our physicians take the safety of our patients, our staff and their families very seriously. We follow AMA Guidelines for Infection Control, which includes minimising the risk of transmitting viruses including the Novel Coronavirus.

Social distancing

If you are coming onsite for your initial consult or review, we have implemented the following guidelines;

All patients should maintain a 1.5-meter distance from each other and their treating rheumatologist as well as our administrative staff at all times. We have allocated areas for waiting and have spaced out our onsite reviews where possible to limit thoroughfare onsite.

We recommend all our patients practice social distancing wherever possible, in particularly, over the next few weeks.

Should patients cease their medication as a precaution?

Some rheumatology patients, particularly those on steroids and biologics, will be immunosuppressed and should therefore be considered 'high risk'. All patients should however continue to take their medication unless directed otherwise by their rheumatology team. If you are planning to start or switch to a new medication this may now need to be reviewed. Please remember patients on long term glucocorticoids (steroids, prednisolone) should not stop these abruptly.

If you are showing any symptoms and you think you might have coronavirus or you've been in close contact with someone who has it:

- stay at home and avoid close contact with other people
- do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital ***(however, please contact your local GP or emergency department via telephone so that they can offer you the best advise at the time of query)***

- contact our clinic to arrange a skype for further advise on your individual circumstances

Should patients who become infected with the virus cease their medication?

If patients develop symptoms of any infection, established practice should be followed and immunosuppressive therapy paused for the duration of the infection and until they feel well, in consultation with their rheumatology team. The expectation is for those on glucocorticoids (steroids, prednisolone) where treatment should not be stopped abruptly and advice should be sought from their treating team.

What precautions should patients be advised to take?

Patients concerned about the risk of infection are advised to take precautions. In addition, patients should ensure that their vaccinations, such as flu and pneumococcal, are up to date to reduce the risk of secondary infections. However, if you have any queries or concerns please contact ArthritisCARE direct to arrange a telehealth consult with your treating Rheumatologist

Should patients who are intending to travel abroad change their plans?

It is strongly advised that immunosuppressed patients as well the elderly and those with chronic illnesses limit their travel wherever possible for the foreseeable future. Patients should be directed to the country-specific advice, which can be accessed from the following:

<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>

However, it is recommended that ALL Australians reconsider their need for overseas travel at this point in time.

Is there any rheumatology-specific data on the impact of coronavirus to date?

We are aware of reports that research is underway to explore the effectiveness of a number of rheumatic drugs in treating coronavirus, although information remains limited at this stage.

Australian Rheumatology Association

Please see below link for updated information on the coronavirus from the ARA

https://rheumatology.org.au/documents/Covidadvice_000.pdf

Telehealth Consultations

In response to best practice guidelines ArthritisCARE will provide telehealth consultation for all of our review consultations wherever possible until further advised. Our skype details are as follows. **PLEASE NOTE THESE EMAIL ACCOUNTS ARE NOT ATTENDED. OUR DIRECT EMAIL FOR ALL DOCTORS IS admin@arthritiscare.com.au**

Any emails sent to the below SKYPE details will not be actioned.

Dr Peter Landsberg - landsbergp.ac@gmail.com

Dr Maryam Zia – mzia.ac@gmail.com

Dr Louise McCormack – l.mccormackac@gmail.com

Dr Clare Owens – owensc.ac@gmail.com