



Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Alert for arthritisCARE patients

With COVID-19 now declared a global pandemic, arthritisCARE will continue to monitor and implement all necessary government recommendations and will do our best to provide a high standard of care for our patients and their families, while at the same time, maintaining a safe workplace for our team and 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 us directly. On phone (07) 3255 1066 or email admin@arthritiscare.com.au for advice.

Likewise, all of our staff will follow the same guidelines to ensure our patients and work colleagues are as safe as is 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. If you are coming onsite for your review or initial consult, please ensure you are not experiencing any 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 (AMA) our Rheumatologists take the safety of our patients, our staff and their families very seriously. We follow the AMA Guidelines for Infection Control, which include minimising the risk of transmitting viruses including the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

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 metre 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, 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 advice at the time of query)
- contact our clinic to arrange a Skype meeting for further advice on your circumstances

Should patients who become infected 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 until they feel well, in consultation with their Rheumatologist. For patients on glucocorticoids (steroids, prednisolone) where treatment should not be stopped abruptly, advice should be sought from their treating team.

What precautions should you 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 Consultation with your treating Rheumatologist.

If you are intending to travel overseas, should you change your plans?

It is strongly advised that immunosuppressed patients, as well as 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 smartraveller.gov.au website.

However, it is recommended that ALL Australians reconsider their need for overseas travel at this point in time - until advised otherwise by the Australian government.

Is there any rheumatology-specific data on Coronavirus?

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

Australian Rheumatology Association

Please see the below link for updated information on the Coronavirus from the Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA).

rheumatology.org.au/documents/COVID-19advicev4.2_000.pdf

Telehealth Consultations

In response to best practice guidelines arthritisCARE will provide Telehealth Consultations for all our review consultations wherever possible until further advised. Our Skype details are as follows.

- Dr Peter Landsberg – landsbergp.ac@gmail.com
- Dr Louise McCormack – l.mccormackac@gmail.com
- Dr Clare Owens – owensc.ac@gmail.com
- Dr Maryam Zia – mzia.ac@gmail.com

Please note these email accounts are not attended. Any emails sent to them will not be actioned. Our direct email for all doctors is admin@arthritiscare.com.au