

Dear Patients,

Thank you for taking the time to read a message on behalf of our team here at NMC, regarding coronavirus.

We have been monitoring global events and responses of various countries to the current pandemic declared by the World Health Organisation.

Coronavirus is a new and emerging disease and as we now see more cases reported, it is clear we will soon confirm increasing community transmission of the virus. What we are also learning, through the experiences of other countries, is the potential serious health consequences especially in vulnerable patient groups.

It is true that most people will get a mild illness, with fever, cough, lethargy, and sore throat the common symptoms. Many people will need no or minimal treatment and will clear the virus and return to good health. Younger patient groups and children are expected to fall into this category.

However, what is becoming clear is that some patients can go on to develop severe respiratory illness, often needing hospitalisation and some progressing to intensive care support, some resulting in deaths.

Our priority at the practice is the health of our patients, staff and our community and as we move towards community transition we need to take measures to protect everyone, but especially those in vulnerable groups.

Some of the vulnerable groups include:

- older patients, especially above the age of 70.
- those with existing heart or lung conditions, diabetes, high blood pressure or those with impaired immune systems.

We have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to provide as safe as possible environment for our patients. The situation is evolving and we will continue to change and adapt the way we practice to the changing conditions of the outbreak.

Some of the changes you may notice include

- phone calls prior to your appointment to ask some screening questions about your risk of having the virus (updated daily according to current state guidelines)
- separating those with symptoms of possible coronavirus to be seen at our building next door to our regular practice (patients will be advised if this is applicable to them)
- wearing masks (both doctor and patient) if someone has symptoms of coronavirus
- offering phone consultations
- offering telehealth (video) consultations

The government is supporting phone and video consultations for some vulnerable groups via the provision of an MBS rebate:

- those 70 and above

- those with confirmed coronavirus or those who are quarantined with coronavirus those under the age of 1
- Pregnant
- chronic health conditions
- immunosuppressed
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients over 50

Telephone and Video consultations are still available outside of the above groups, however you will not be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

We ask you as a member of our practice community to please help us limit the spread of this illness. Please inform our staff if you have had symptoms or had contact with a confirmed or suspected coronavirus case. We will then be able to assess where we can most safely see and treat you. It may be over the phone or video consultation, or if we need to examine you it will be in our separate building. Over what may be a difficult time ahead we urge people with symptoms or contacts to consider the implications to others both within the practice and out in the community. Although you may or may not be in a vulnerable group, think of family members or friends who may be at risk. The person sitting next to you in the waiting room or the line at the supermarket may be elderly, unwell or immune suppressed. Self isolation and social distancing will limit the spread and the impact of coronavirus.

Testing for coronavirus is changing daily according to state guidelines. At present it is limited to those at highest risk (which at present are returned travellers/ or contacts of confirmed cases/ or health care workers). It does mean there may be more cases in the community that are not being diagnosed. Testing is currently limited to a few centres and the Chief Medical Officer has already flagged limited PPE (equipment required to take the sample) as well as testing kits. We are unsure when testing will be expanded.

As a GP group we have all 14GPs here this week, we review the state and national guidelines daily, we keep informed of the latest developments filtering in from overseas, we communicate all new developments multiple times a day. If you would like further discuss coronavirus any of our GPs are happy to consult via phone/ video or within regular consultations.

For those at risk it may be time to consider limiting avoidable interactions, unfortunately even when showing no symptoms the virus can be transmitted. Social distancing, working from home and avoiding gatherings will all be important measures to protect yourself.

If you would like to stay informed on developments within the practice, please join our email list by sending your email to manager@newtownmc.com.au

Stay safe and healthy and we look forward to looking after all our patient community, as the practice has done so for 80+years, over what may be testing time ahead. Thank you again for trusting your health care to the team at Newtown Medical centre.

Kind Regards,

Dr James Carter
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