

# COVID-19 Canberra Health Services GP Update

24 March 2020

## What's happening at Canberra Health Services

In line with national and territory-wide plans and directions to prepare for, and respond to COVID-19, GPs need to be aware of the following strategies being implemented across Canberra Health Services (CHS):

- CHS is reducing all non-urgent, non-essential and non-admitted activity across all services in an effort to relieve pressure on the health system and reduce the spread of COVID-19. This includes elective surgery, community-based services, and medical outpatient appointments, procedures and treatments.
- From Thursday, 26 March 2020, appointments that clinicians deem to be non-essential will be cancelled or postponed.
- Category 1 and equivalent services will continue to be provided.
- Patient referrals on the elective surgery waitlist are being clinically reviewed to ensure that the most urgent surgery is prioritised.
- Where possible, essential appointments not requiring face to face consultation will be converted to virtual appointments on a digital platform by the end of this week. This will include telephone or video consultations.
- People attending CHS are asked to come alone unless they need someone to help them. People are asked to not come to CHS if they have been overseas in the last 14 days; have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19; or have symptoms of fever, cough, cold, flu or diarrhoea.

- CHS is contacting patients whose appointments or treatments are affected. No patient will lose their spot on the wait list as a result of these actions.
- If consumers determine that they no longer need the service their referral will be cancelled. However, should it need to be reinstated it will be done so at the original date.
- GPs are asked to only refer patients with urgent conditions to CHS until further notice.
- GPs are encouraged to use HealthPathways for information on caring for specific conditions in your patients.
- We are working with our specialists to provide additional information in their letters to assist you with monitoring and management of your patients.
- If you think your patient's condition has deteriorated and requires urgent care, please phone CHS on (02) 5124 0000 and ask to speak to the relevant on call registrar. Please remember that CHS resources are likely to be severely stretched during the coming months. Only call if it is truly urgent.

### Assessing and testing for COVID-19

- Up to date recommendations for GPs regarding COVID-19 testing are available on the Chief Health Officer (CHO) Alerts page of the ACT Health website. GPs are reminded to refer to the current case definition on the CHO website and to avoid testing outside of these recommendations.
- Referrers must provide adequate clinical history on the pathology form, including travel history, contact with confirmed cases and patient symptoms, to allow the laboratory to triage and prioritise testing.
- GP collected samples may be sent to ACT Pathology or Capital Pathology for testing.
- Capital Pathology is able to collect samples for COVID 19 testing.
- Patients can also attend an ACT Walk-in Centre (WiC) for COVID-19 testing. The Weston Creek WiC (24 Parkinson Street, Weston) is the preferred centre. It is not necessary to call ahead. WiCs are open from 7.30am to 10pm every day.

- A Respiratory Assessment Clinic has commenced at Canberra Hospital in Building 3, with access from Bateson Road. The clinic is open seven days from 8.30am to 4.30pm. GPs are welcome to send patients there for assessment and sample collection if they meet the criteria.
- A drive through Respiratory Assessment Clinic for COVID-19 has opened at Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC). Access will be from the main gate on Flemington Road only. The drive through clinic is open seven days from 9.30am to 6.00pm (last cars at 5.00pm).
- Trained staff can carry out assessments of people who present at all sites with symptoms and, if required, collect the necessary pathology samples.

For the latest information on COVID-19 see [health.act.gov.au](https://health.act.gov.au) and the [Department of Health](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert) website: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>.

You can also get updates on the [ACT Chief Health Officer alerts page](https://www.health.act.gov.au/health-professionals/chief-health-officer-alerts) (<https://www.health.act.gov.au/health-professionals/chief-health-officer-alerts>).

**Medical Director GP Liaison Unit CHS**