

## Letter to the CF Community from the CF Centre Directors

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Dear all,

The Centre Directors have been discussing a unified response to questions from people with CF and their carers about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly changing and CF Centres are dealing with issues as they emerge and making necessary preparations to respond effectively and quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly encourage you to visit the State or Federal Health services websites for up-to-date information explaining what is known about COVID-19 and the current governmental recommendations. The CF State organisations, CFAustralia and the US CF Foundation have interesting information:

[www.cysticfibrosis.org.au](http://www.cysticfibrosis.org.au)

[www.cfw.org.au/news/coronavirus-and-cystic-fibrosis](http://www.cfw.org.au/news/coronavirus-and-cystic-fibrosis)

[cfcc.org.au/covid-19-coronavirus-resources](http://cfcc.org.au/covid-19-coronavirus-resources)

[www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Daily-Life/Germs-and-Staying-Healthy/What-Are-Germs/COVID-19-Community-Questions-and-Answers](http://www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Daily-Life/Germs-and-Staying-Healthy/What-Are-Germs/COVID-19-Community-Questions-and-Answers)

### ***Please find answers to frequently asked questions:***

#### ***Q: Is my CF centre open? How do I access it?***

**At present, all CF Centres have stated that they are open** and offering most services with some modifications to make access to clinical reviews and advice safer, and accommodate the needs of the hospital. Access to advice and support is via the usual channels/systems operated by your clinic. Many Centres are developing systems to use Telehealth and other technologies to minimise face-to-face encounters. Telehealth offers the chance to interact with your CF centre whilst minimising risk of exposure to the COVID-19.

Please contact your CF clinic to find out which arrangements are available, whether they are appropriate for you / your child in your / their current state of health or if a face-to-face assessment is required, and whether they include FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, PEXIP, Cisco Web ex or even phone consultations.

#### ***Q: Is it safe to visit my CF clinic?***

Your CF clinic staff will apply the same careful infection control practices that are always done. The clinics are very experienced in working to prevent the spread of infection. This is no different to the care we and you always take when visiting the clinic. Every care will be taken to keep you / your child free of infection with COVID and provide the important care you / your child needs.

***Q: What if I am / my child with CF is unwell and need review?***

Please contact your clinic in the usual way to discuss your / your child's condition.

Clinics will arrange for you / your child to be seen based on symptoms and medical history, just as they usually do.

Measuring your / your child's temperature to see if a fever is present may be helpful for the clinic in their decision making and preparation for your visit.

**If you, or your child with CF, are unwell, especially if short of breath, then clearly you need to be seen, so contact your local clinic. The situation with COVID-19 is changing rapidly and your clinic will keep you up-to-date with changes to how clinics are operating and how to access care.**

**If you are in doubt – please contact your clinic for this information.**

***Q: I am worried I have / my child with CF has COVID-19 infection.  
What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of COVID-19 infection in the community include:

1. Sore throat
2. Fever
3. New persistent cough (often dry in non-CF people, but can be moist too)
4. Runny nose and headache, aching and fatigue
5. Difficulty breathing (more serious infection)

**We do not know if people with CF will develop different, more or less severe symptoms to the general population.**

**As usual – if you are concerned about you or your child's health contact your CF clinic for advice.**

***Q: How do I continue to get my / my child's medications - can I get them locally?***

**Collection of medications from hospital pharmacies needs to continue without interruption and hospitals are making the necessary preparations to provide ongoing CF medications.**

Many pharmacies are developing systems to deliver important drugs to people with CF without interruption. Contact your local CF clinic and find out the simplest way to continue your medications throughout this period.

**Q: How can I reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19 ?**

Many of the recommendations are already part of daily life for people with CF.

1. **Social (physical) distancing** – The Federal Government recommends no physical contact and remaining at least one and a half metres from all other people at all times ***this is just like you already do!!***. Avoid social gatherings and events where possible, don't shake hands and encourage children to avoid close contact with friends. COVID-19 exists in cough aerosols so staying away from others lessens the chance of inhaling someone else's viruses

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-social-distancing>

2. **Hand washing** with soap and water, and sanitising if available, on a regular basis and importantly before touching your face, food or drink, or your nebuliser or other equipment. Teach your children how to do this effectively and encourage them to do this at school.

***this is just like you / your child should already do !!***

3. If you do have to go into the hospital, put on a facemask as you arrive.

4. **Contact with unwashed surfaces.** Importantly, the COVID-19 does survive for many hours on surfaces that have not been washed, so assume that all surfaces (door handles, light switches, etc) are contaminated-  
Clean surfaces around the home and workplace regularly.  
You / your child may like to use the elbow, a pen or key etc to activate switches in public areas.

5. **Working from home and attending school ??**

If you have the option of working or studying from home this may reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Recommendations regarding school attendance for children with CF are under review at present. In the meantime all children with CF attending school should carefully follow the precautions and recommendations outlined by the government and local health authorities: i.e. social distancing, avoiding assemblies, sports and athletic events, music and social gatherings; and handwashing regularly.

Contact your local clinic to discuss this further as different areas in Australia have different rates of COVID-19 infections with currently many more infections in some areas eg Sydney than in others eg Perth, so government recommendations may differ from State to State.

Your CF clinics and hospitals have been working very hard over the past weeks to prepare for COVID-19 and provide the best care in the upcoming months.

Some clinics may not have had time for more frequent contact with you as a result. Please be patient.

***In summary, the ongoing care of people with CF will need to continue as longterm maintenance of health is very important for all people with CF.***

***This needs to be balanced with any short-term risks of contracting COVID-19.***

Signed

Drs Tonia Douglas and Peter Middleton  
On behalf of the Australian CF Centre Directors.