

## **Coastal Immunology and ASCIA Advice for Management of Immune Conditions in Current Pandemic Setting**

This information sheet has been adapted from the update provided by the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)

Our general advice is not to suddenly cease immune suppression without good reason. You are on this therapy to control a serious condition, and we would not wish to see premature relapse of your condition. Such reflexive action (e.g. ceasing your immunosuppressive drugs) may make things worse should you encounter viruses such as COVID-19.

### **What is COVID-19 and how does it spread?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections, including the common cold and more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus (formerly the Novel 2019-nCoV coronavirus), causes coronavirus disease (COVID-19), with symptoms that include cough, fever and shortness of breath. This virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in December 2019. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is assessing ongoing research on how COVID-19 is spread. Studies to date suggest that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is mainly spread through contact with respiratory droplets containing the virus.

COVID-19 can spread when someone:

- Inhales droplets containing the virus when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes.
- Touches a person or surface that is contaminated with droplets containing the virus, then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter the body and cause illness.

### **What are the Symptoms?**

You may have cough (often dry), fever, runny nose, or shortness of breath. While most people will have only mild symptoms, around one in six have more severe features, including pneumonia, and around 5% will require ICU support.

Although temperatures are often normal with infected, immunosuppressed people, a home thermometer and temperature record may be useful as part of self-monitoring if you are feeling unwell.

*If you develop fever or respiratory symptoms, call your primary carer or Healthdirect Hotline 1800 022 222 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to speak about your health concerns. When you call, inform them where you have travelled and if you have been in contact with a confirmed case. If symptoms are severe, visit your local emergency department.*

### **What precautions should people with immunodeficiencies take?**

Most people with immunodeficiencies and those on medications that suppress their immune system are considered to be at greater risk of any respiratory infections. Precautions they take to prevent infections are consistent with the actions listed below, and they should follow the usual advice from their physician. People with severe immunodeficiency or immunosuppression, including those undergoing bone marrow (stem cell) transplant are at high risk from all infections. They will already be aware of the need to avoid infections, (including actions listed below) and what to do if they are unwell or come in contact with any infectious disease. People with immunodeficiencies who receive

monthly immunoglobulin replacement therapy infusions in hospitals still need to receive their treatment. Hospital infection control policies are in place with extra precautions to isolate patients with, or at risk of getting, COVID-19. If infection of COVID-19 is suspected at the time of infusion, promptly contact the treating team for advice.

### **What actions can reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections?**

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, the following actions should be taken:

- Hand hygiene is the top priority. Regular and thorough hand washing with soap and water throughout the day, particularly after using the bathroom and before eating is vital for preventing infections. Alcohol-based hand-gel can be used to sanitise hands when soap and water isn't available. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Also avoid shaking hands or any other greeting that involves contact. Respiratory hygiene is also a priority. This involves covering the mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, then disposing of the used tissue immediately. It is also important to maintain at least one to two metres distance away from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home if unwell. If anyone has a fever, cough and breathing difficulty, they should stay home, seek medical attention (call in advance), and follow the local health authority instructions.
- Avoid travelling and places where there is a high risk of disease spread. This includes cruise ships and large gatherings in confined spaces.

### **When is self-isolation required?**

Self-isolation is required if contact has been made with someone with COVID-19 symptoms, or symptoms develop following contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Information on how to self-isolate is on the following websites:

[www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-isolation-guidance](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-isolation-guidance)

[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirushealth-advice-general-public/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirushealth-advice-general-public/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation)

### **Further information**

The situation regarding COVID-19 is rapidly changing, so it is important to monitor information from the WHO, Australian government, New Zealand government, international immunodeficiency organisations and ASCIA.

- WHO [www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses](http://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses)
- AUSTRALIA [www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov](http://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov) Call the Coronavirus Health Information Line 1800 020 080 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) if you are seeking information on novel coronavirus. *If you develop fever or respiratory symptoms, call your primary carer or Healthdirect Hotline 1800 022 222 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to speak about your health concerns. When you call, inform them where you have travelled and if you have been in contact with a confirmed case. If symptoms are severe, visit your local emergency department.*