

FAQs

COVID-19 information for patients

Updated Wednesday, 26 August 2020

For more information see our COVID-19 page at epworth.org.au/who-we-are/coronavirus-update

For maternity specific information and questions, see [maternity patients](#)

What changes are happening for surgery patients?

Epworth HealthCare is proud to be part of Victoria's statewide pandemic response to the pandemic. We have been working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) since the pandemic began.

In line with the DHHS guidelines, Epworth has reduced elective surgery across our Melbourne hospitals to ensure there is available capacity to support the pandemic and preserve supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE).

To minimise potential exposure to COVID-19 within our hospitals, and to keep us all safe, we are implementing testing and screening of all surgical patients, and have a no visitor policy, with limited exceptions such as compassionate needs, maternity support and a parent/guardian for children. We thank you for understanding.

Our hospitals may look a bit different right now, but you'll still receive the same excellent care.

Who needs to be tested?

All Epworth surgical patients who require a general anaesthetic for their procedure now require COVID-19 swabbing before coming into hospital. This includes:

- all elective surgery (including endoscopy).
- emergency surgery
- IVF and maternity
- electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- carers who will be accompanying patients overnight, including paediatric patients.

Medical admissions (not involving surgery), dialysis and day-infusions do not require testing.

I come in regularly for oncology/dialysis – do I need to be tested each time?

No, only patients who require general anaesthetic for their procedure need to be tested.

Why do I need COVID-19 testing?

Testing protects all of us. It minimises the risk of transmission to other patients and staff. The risks for COVID-19 patients undergoing both elective and emergency surgery are higher than otherwise expected, even when surgery is relatively minor. Therefore, it is safer to postpone elective surgery for someone who is symptomatic or who tests positive for COVID-19 – unless the risks of not having surgery outweighs the risk of proceeding. Any decisions made will be in consultation with you and your treating doctor.

What do I need to do to get tested?

Make an appointment at one of our Epworth Pre-Op Testing Clinics in Richmond, East Melbourne, Box Hill or Geelong by calling 03 9426 0666.

Melbourne Pathology sites can also provide testing for Epworth patients in Bentleigh, Ferntree Gully, Frankston and North Melbourne. Call 03 9287 7700.

For patients living in a nursing home and unable to access a testing clinic, please contact Melbourne Pathology on the number above to request testing in your nursing home.

I got tested locally – can I use these results?

If you had a test outside an Epworth Pre-Op Testing Clinic, or Melbourne Pathology, documentation of the test results will need to be sighted by the treating health team.

How long before I get my results?

It can take up to five days to get results. It's really important you stay at home after your test, until the time of your admission (no matter what the test results are in the interim). Please don't put yourself and others at risk by going to work, school or public places, unless you need medical help or it's an emergency.

What does swab testing involve?

The test takes around a minute and involves a swab from the back of your throat and nose.

Can I do a saliva test instead?

Nasal swabbing is the gold standard test. Saliva testing has been introduced in a limited manner only for testing of vulnerable people. This test misses about 13% of infections.

How do I stay isolated before surgery?

While you may find it difficult, isolating before your surgery is really important. Here's some guidelines to follow:

- Remain at your place of residence/home.
- Do not leave except to seek medical help or in an emergency.
- Do not go to work, school or public areas
- We advise against using public transport, taxis or ride share services where possible. If you require any of these transport options, please wear a mask.
- Do not allow other people into your place of residence if they do not live there.
- Avoid sharing household items. Please do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding or other items with any people in your home. After using these items, you should wash them thoroughly with hot water and detergent.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can use alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water is not available and your hands are not visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay 1.5 metres from others in your home.

For more information refer to this factsheet: [Isolating before your surgery](#)

I have no one to take me to hospital – can I call a taxi or Uber?

We advise against using public transport, taxis or ride share services where possible. If you require any of these transport options, please wear a mask.

What if I develop symptoms of COVID-19 before my surgery - fever, cough, sore throat, breathing difficulties or wheezing or any other signs of respiratory infection?

Get tested immediately and self-isolate. Your test results will determine what decisions are made based on your individual circumstance. The risks for COVID-19 patients undergoing both elective and emergency surgery are higher than otherwise expected, even when surgery is relatively minor. Therefore, it is safer to postpone elective surgery for someone who is symptomatic or who tests positive for COVID-19 – unless the risks of not having surgery outweighs the risk of proceeding while COVID-19 positive. Any decisions made will be in consultation with you and your treating doctor.

Can family and friends visit me in hospital?

For the safety of patients, staff and doctors, we've made the difficult decision to strictly limit visitors to our hospitals. Our no visitor policy has limited exceptions such as compassionate needs, maternity support and a parent/guardian for children. We understand keeping patients and their loved ones in contact with one another is important and we encourage you to do this through other means such phone calls, FaceTime and Skype. See our website:

[Visitor information](#)

What if my essential caregiver or special circumstance support person tests positive to COVID-19?

If your essential caregiver or special circumstance support person tests positive to COVID-19 they will not be able to come to the hospital. You are very welcome to have a back-up support person on standby, in case that happens. Your back-up support person will also need to follow the same process of being tested and self-isolating. If your back-up person can't self-isolate, they will need to wear a mask if they must leave the house for one of the four reasons allowed: shopping for food and supplies, medical care and caregiving, exercise and recreation, and study and work.

Are the rules different for maternity?

We will continue to do all we can to support you before, during and after your baby's birth. You are now required to have a COVID-19 swab prior to your admission, along with your partner or support person. Once you've had your swab, you'll both need to self-isolate until you are admitted to hospital. See our website: [Maternity patients](#)

Will I need to wear a mask all the time while in hospital?

Patients in our hospitals will wear masks based on clinical circumstances. Speak to your treating doctor if you have any concerns. Essential caregivers and special circumstance support people will also need to wear a mask in our hospitals and sites.

What measures are in place to reduce the risk of infection in hospital?

We have strict policies and procedures to reduce the risk of infection, which are constantly being reviewed and updated based on the latest the DHHS and clinical advice and information. Measures include swabbing and screening of all patients, a no visitor policy (with

limited exceptions such as compassionate needs, maternity support and a parent/guardian for children), physical distancing in all communal areas (e.g. receptions, waiting areas), multiple hand sanitising stations throughout all sites, wearing of masks and increased use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for our staff and doctors.

What if I need emergency surgery?

No emergency patient will be compromised by having to wait for a test or result.

Will it be harder to book surgery?

Bookings will require consultation with your specialist doctor, who will provide us with detailed notes around your individual clinical need/priority. Due to numbers being capped by the Victorian state government, case selection will be based on clinical priority. Please speak to your specialist if you have any questions.

Is my surgery likely to be postponed?

With the current restrictions across Victoria, plus additional testing requirements, the number of elective surgery cases will decrease. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable and does mean we are prioritising emergency and urgent cases, along with all procedures necessary for cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment. The surgery that proceeds will be made in consultation with your doctor. If your surgery is postponed, we will contact you to arrange a new date for surgery.

What if my condition gets worse before my surgery?

If you feel your condition has changed you should immediately contact your GP or treating doctor.

Can I bring a friend or family member to my oncology/dialysis appointment?

Visitors will no longer be permitted in our hospitals and sites (with a few exceptions). We understand this will be challenging and disappointing, but we'll do everything we can to provide you with the comfort and support you need during your appointment. Advice is regularly being [updated on our website](#).

Who can I contact if I have a question about my elective surgery?

Call your treating doctor or the Epworth hospital you are attending. All our numbers are listed on our website at epworth.org.au