

Update for the Public: 9 April 2020

COVID-19

It feels like a century ago that we heard about a virus in China, but in a mere 100 days our world has been turned upside down. The life we used to have has changed. Our freedom has gone. In many cases we cannot work, finances are tight and we have reduced social contact with our family and friends. We are on a beautiful island and cannot fully enjoy all it has to offer. These are very stressful times for many people on Norfolk and across the world. TV, radio or social media do not help because this shows how severely the pandemic is affecting everyone. This can make people more angry, sad or anxious. From that point of view Norfolk is no different to other parts of the world. Norfolk is different though, in that we are in a 'bubble' and can find it difficult to experience the reality of the situation. It is hard to imagine what all the fuss is about when we are so far removed geographically and personally. Norfolk is different in other ways too. At this point we don't seem to have COVID-19 on the island and if it is here, we are managing to keep it from spreading rapidly. We are also different from many other places in the world in that we are a very small, supportive community, whereby we share and help one another in difficult times.

During or after a traumatic event people often feel different emotions; some anger, some grief, some hopelessness and some thankfully a positivity to just get on with the job at hand. It is important to understand what your emotions are and what others around you are experiencing. Try to be helpful, rather than criticising others who may feel or react differently to you. It is not a person or people who are restricting your life at the moment – it is the virus!

You will have heard repeatedly on TV about 'flattening the curve'. What does this mean? It means that instead of 100 people being infected all at once (which could lead to a higher death rate because the medical services cannot cope), we reduce the spread of cases into a community to a slow trickle, allowing people to become immune to the virus and the health workers to cope with the illness.

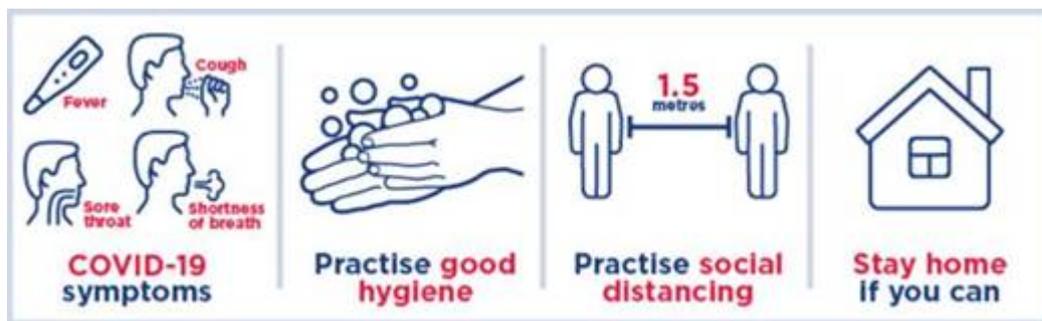
Pathway forward: The lockdown on Norfolk was initiated due to several people breaching their self-isolation. This created the risk of the virus entering and spreading across the island. To date, we do not have positive swab tests, but need to be mindful that the test has a 70% success rate (in other words 30% false negative rate). We are seeing an increase in respiratory infections at the moment (as is usual in autumn and winter) and with the reduction in flights, we cannot get swabs to a metropolitan area more than 2–3 times a week. So despite negative tests, we are maintaining a very cautious approach for the good of everyone. We have decreased the numbers of incoming passengers which of course is our biggest area of risk. In time and with strict isolation measures, we should be able to have a better idea of whether COVID-19 has come to the island and if so, how it is spreading. It would be truly naïve (knowing that there are millions of cases in all countries around the world), to believe that we can keep COVID-19 away permanently. If all is going well, and we are happy that the risk of infection or spread is low, we will be able to go out of lockdown and back to the measures we had prior to that, while monitoring the success of our methods. Should we note that the disease is on the island and spreading we may need to increase restrictions. Ultimately a vaccine is the best answer but this may be many months away.

Important factors in reducing spread of the virus:

- Isolation: every passenger entering Norfolk will be put into quarantine away from others for 2 weeks (or longer should they become unwell). Anyone on the island who is

displaying symptoms that could be COVID -19 will be tested and kept isolated until their test returns negative or they are well.

- Social distancing. This is still seen as the most important way to reduce spread of the virus. This involves:
 - Limiting numbers of people gathering together
 - Maintaining safe distances between persons in offices and workplaces during face to face meetings – 1.5m between each person
 - Reduce non-essential social contact especially for older people and people with health problems
 - Avoid touching the face (except after hand washing)



Testing for COVID-19: At present we have increased our testing in line with guidelines from NSW Health. We still only test people with symptoms that may be COVID-19. Our test would be negative if we tested well people. There is discussion in Australia about blood testing and we are keeping up to date with this development. As soon as it is available, we will advocate for it to be available on Norfolk.

Please call us on 22091 should you become ill. Our doctors can speak to you on the telephone and if necessary send a nurse out to take a swab, advise you to come to our drive –in testing or get you to come to the hospital. Please do not come to the hospital without calling, unless it is urgent, in which case, please call an ambulance on 000.

Influenza vaccines: These should be available within the next few weeks. We will announce in the media how we intend to arrange vaccination as soon as we receive them. We encourage as many people as possible on Norfolk to have this injection, as we are obviously trying to prevent a simultaneous influenza and COVID-19 outbreak both for our at-risk patients and our limited numbers of healthcare workers.

Keeping the people of Norfolk safe will rely on cooperation from all of us.

Thank you to each and every one on Norfolk for working together to help our community.

Dr Michelle Bonnici

Medical Superintendent, NIHRACS