

Message from the Medical Superintendent, Dr Michelle Bonnici

30 April 2020

We are entering a new phase in the management of COVID-19 and in many ways this is more difficult than the first phase. We can see the difference isolation and social distancing makes to the number of cases of COVID in Australia. This could create a feeling of complacency. The virus is an unseen enemy and in our personal lives we do not even see the effects of it. Watching TV does bring some reality to our lounge room but it is still far removed from us. This feeling of apparent “safety” makes us want to steam ahead and get some normality back to our lives.

Norfolk Island indeed the whole of the world wants to see coronavirus restrictions dropped but if they want them gone forever permanent changes will need to be made to their everyday lives.

In Australia the Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy told reporters yesterday that the way Australians physically interact would be very different in the future - perhaps even permanently. "Even if we relieve restrictions in the future, people need to change the way they interact permanently," he said.

"And in the sensible way, like keeping distance from each other, hand hygiene, probably not permanently not shaking hands, but for the foreseeable future."

With this sobering thought in mind we should plan the future – at least the next year on Norfolk Island with care. We would indeed be happy to have no COVID on the island and be able to invite visitors back as soon as practically possible.

To have better information about our risks on Norfolk we will be advising more testing for COVID. Anyone with the following will be tested:

- Unexplained fever(more than 37.7°C) history of fever OR acute respiratory symptoms

I have been made aware that people may not wish to be tested as this means they will be isolated until their test returns negative. This is a shared responsibility to keep each other safe and virus-free and I personally would be most disappointed if that is a view held in this caring community

This week there will be council rangers assisting with education and monitoring of the community. The aim of this is not to turn Norfolk into a “police state” but to assist with compliance on social distancing within situations in day to day life. This will enable the community to move slowly forward and reduce restrictions while monitoring the effect.

I understand the wish to return to the “normal” we had prior to COVID but this will not be possible for many months. A vaccine is currently being tested in Australia but even if it is effective roll out to the public may take many months. The WHO has also cautioned about taking the approach that being infected with the virus means immunity and is therefore affords the person safety This is still very unclear. Provisional information suggests that immunity may occur for up to a month in some individuals but is unknown thereafter. As the virus has only been with us since December any surety of immunity will take time.

Our biggest risk to this community remains the arrival of people to the island. At present there is a monitored mandatory 14 day quarantine and testing of unwell people while in quarantine. This cannot be lifted soon as this is the only defence we currently have against COVID. Short term restrictions will have long term gain. The way to win a marathon is not to sprint through it from the start line to the finish line

I do not mean to be negative but realistic. My suggestion is to enjoy what you are able to do at this time and go about your usual business as much as you can, always bearing in mind that the “new” way of life for the foreseeable future is to have social distancing the norm We live on an amazing island with lots of caring folk around us - and so far are safe from the spread of the virus.

Have a good and happy weekend!

Community Supports First Drive-In Flu Vaccine Clinic

In the current COVID-19 pandemic environment providing the government funded flu vaccines to eligible people in the Community called for an innovative approach. This is exactly what happened on Wednesday 22 April where over 110 community members had their annual flu jabs in their own cars. This took a team approach where one of our GPs, Practice Nurse, Practice Manager and Administrative Officers, teamed up with St John Ambulance and our community to make it work. As a result many members of our community who could have been most adversely affected by the flu are now protected. Photos below show the team involved in making this happen demonstrating social distancing and one of the patients having just had her flu vaccine delivered to her car. Thanks to everyone involved, this is just one example of the community coming together, safely, to achieve a great outcome.

We are anticipating that the more government funded and “private” vaccinations will arrive in the coming weeks. Unfortunately we don’t yet have an exact date. Please stay tuned, we will be taking bookings shortly. The government funded flu vaccines are free to the following patients:

- All people aged 65 and over
- All pregnant ladies
- All patients aged 15 years and over with DOCUMENTED chronic disease such as:
 - Cardiac disease
 - Chronic respiratory conditions
 - Chronic neurological conditions
 - Immunocompromised patients
 - Diabetes
 - Renal disease and
 - Haematological (Blood) disorders

The cost for “private” flu vaccinations will be \$20 per patient.





GP Clinic

Norfolk Island GP Clinic aims to provide comprehensive coordinated healthcare services promoting health and wellbeing as well as managing illness.

The General Practice clinic is still open for business for all your health care needs and our emergency department is still running. However to decrease the risk of COVID-19 our processes of practice have changed and Medicare is providing us funding for telephone consultations where our Doctors can provide their services without you having to present to NIHRACS. If the assessing Doctor decides you need further essential medical intervention they will inform you on what to do next. To book appointments please phone our reception on 24134. Please continue to help us to reduce the risks of coronavirus on our small community by taking advantage of our telehealth services.

Hours of Operation

Monday- Friday 8.30am – 5pm

Saturday & Sunday Closed

Please note the clinic is closed for lunch from 12.30 – 1.30pm.

Please call 24134 for appointments only during opening hours.

Please note that Dr Jenny Sexton is now consulting on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

If you require medical assistance outside business hours please phone the hospital on 22091. In cases of emergency please dial 000.

A look inside the new High Dependency Unit

Work is now complete on the new High Dependency Unit at the Hospital. The two bed unit with two ventilators and other new equipment will provide the capability and capacity to care for patients requiring intensive care if the need arises. Training for nurses and doctors on the use of the equipment is in progress.



Advice for family and friends visiting our residents in Aged Care

COVID-19 is a major health risk for older people. The current visiting restrictions are there to protect our residents. Please note the following:

Please do not visit the Aged Care facility (Dar Randa) if you have:

- Returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- Been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Have a fever or symptoms of a respiratory infection such as a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath

If you wish to visit Dar Randa you will be asked questions related to the above as we are required to ask them of everyone entering the facility, including staff.

Other important notes for visitors of Dar Randa:

- Only one visitor for each Resident is allowed
- Visits should be kept short
- Visits are to be held in the Resident's room, outdoors or in an area advised by staff
- From May 1 2020 all visitors must have had their influenza vaccination
- No group social activities, school or early childhood visits nor entertainment are allowed at present

You are most welcome to call your family member or friend or send a card or letter.

Many thanks for your understanding.

Dental Clinic Update

COVID-19 has very quickly created a new normal, disrupting day-to-day life as we have come to know it. While the implications of the pandemic for the community of Norfolk Island changes on a regular basis, your dental health continues to be important.

Limited dental services resumed on Tuesday 28 April in line with the Dental Association of Australia guidelines. Each patient's care and treatment plan will be determined on a case by case basis and the dentistry team will communicate this with you.

It's impossible to say when things will return to normal and when you will be able to visit the dentist for your usual check-up. However, for the time being please remember to:

- Brush your teeth and gums 2 times daily using a soft brush
- Eat healthy snacks
- Don't have too many sweet foods and drinks
- Use of mouth wash daily or simply rinse/gargle with salt water

- Floss daily

(As per Australian Dental Association guidelines)

Due to new protocols following Covid-19, we have asked if members of the public could please call the dental clinic on 22910 to have a discussion about your dental situation before making an appointment and arriving unannounced at the surgery.

Healthy Lifestyle Webinar recordings now available on NIHRACS Website

Two of the recent healthy lifestyle webinars were recorded and are now available on the NIHRACS website (www.norfolkislandhealth.gov.nf) under the Health and Wellbeing tab. These are:

- Meditation – with Dr Nitin Gupte
- Physical Activity ideas when isolated – Kay Taylor

Launch of Health and Wellbeing Messaging Campaign



On Thursday 30 April we launched the new Norfolk Island Health and Wellbeing Facebook page and linked health messaging campaign. It will provide a series of posts and emails, each one linked to one of the four COVID-19 key health messages. These are:

- Social distancing
- Stop any Spread – hygiene
- Look after yourself and others
- Know the symptoms

We are incorporating a slogan to promote that as a Community we can make the changes needed to minimise the risks involved with the COVID-19 virus pandemic on our Island. The slogan is **Norfolk te-gadda we ell (Norfolk, Together, we can)**. This theme will be carried through all the posts and emails. We wish to keep this campaign as positive as possible. It is all about prevention and caring for our and other's health and wellbeing.

We are also launching the **Norfolk te-gadda** competitions. We invite you to share their own interpretation of the key messages in a positive way, eg comments, photos, videos (max 30 seconds long), artwork, poetry, short story. Prizes will be awarded for best family and individual entry.

Some ideas could include Norfolk pine hugging, social distancing friendly greetings, jingles promoting one of the messages.

To enter, please either post to the Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Facebook page or email to karen.walker@hospital.gov.nf.

Domestic and Family Violence Awareness

During these, at times, stressful days of isolation due to the COVID 19 pandemic, awareness of domestic and family violence has increased in importance. There may be many triggers for this behaviour but abuse is usually related to issues around power and control with the abuser dominating and manipulating others to get their needs met.

Domestic and Family violence is not only related to intimate partner violence but occurs across the spectrum including relationships between parents and children, sibling to sibling abuse and very concerning is the abuse of the elderly.

Elder abuse is any mistreatment of an older person by another person with whom they have a relationship of trust. Often that person is a family member or carer, but could also be a friend or neighbour who they depend upon. The abuse can be financial, verbal, emotional, physical or sexual, or could involve social isolation or neglect of the older person.

What can you do if an older person is experiencing abuse?

- Talk to the person you are concerned about. Invite them to talk in a place where they are alone and safe.
- Listen to the person. Offer them your time and support and respect their right to make their own decisions.
- Remind them they are not to blame and that everyone has the right to live in safety and be treated with dignity and respect.
- Let them know that help is available and offer to assist them in getting the necessary support if and when they are ready to do so.
- If they are in immediate harm or their property is damaged, call the police.
- Encourage the older person to speak to a counsellor, psychologist or social worker who can provide support and advice.

The NIHRACS Counsellor, Social Worker and Anglicare all work closely with the Norfolk Police and the Local Court and there is accommodation that NIHRACS provides as a safe house.

For information about local and off-island services available please refer to the *Directory of Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Available in Response to COVID19 Pandemic* in this paper and also available on the NIHRACS website (www.norfolkislandhealth.gov.nf)