

Medical Superintendent COVID-19 Update

Testing for COVID-19

The current situation on Norfolk is that we have more returning residents and visitors and that increases the risk of COVID coming to the island. We also have an increase in respiratory viral illnesses which is usual in winter. COVID-19 can present in many forms – from asymptomatic to severe illness and many levels in between. Norfolk has increased vulnerability from the point of view of age and chronic disease, our remote location and a small health facility. NIHRACS has therefore formulated a policy to test patients with even the mildest of symptoms so as to detect COVID early, should it enter Norfolk. This policy has had the approval of NSW Public Health and SESLHD (South East Sydney Local Health District)

At NIHRACS, we have very limited on-site COVID test capacity. We are constantly trying to source more cartridges for our GeneXpert analyser but will also need to keep some in stock in case of a positive case that requires contact tracing and increased levels of testing. We can also send tests to Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney on the first available flight. Flights are not frequent and the turn-around time for testing can vary from 3-14 days.

While we understand that this is inconvenient to many people, we still urge you to call our clinic if you are unwell. I am sure that no-one would want to be inadvertently spreading COVID on the island and that there are many in the community who will gladly test and be in isolation rather than risk spreading the disease to their loved ones. Please be mindful that it is a small ask to stay home until you test negative or are well and pose no risk to others. We know that it is very difficult for some to be isolated and to assist with this NIHRACS has arranged health and welfare phone calls to individuals in that situation

The criteria we use for testing for COVID on Norfolk are the same as NSW Public Health:

- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 including fever (> or = 37.5) cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of smell and loss of taste
- Patients who have been referred by the GP or public health unit for testing for example close contacts of positive cases
- Patients whose clinician, after taking a full history, has reason to suspect that the patient may have COVID-19

NOTE: people without symptoms should not be tested

We are frequently asked about other members of the household. Our current policy is that people living in the house with the person in isolation need not necessarily be in isolation, if they are well. This poses a small risk to others and we are therefore requesting that household members, if able, should try to be in a separate part of the house and use a separate bathroom. If they become ill, they are to stay home and call the GP clinic or hospital to speak to a doctor.

The decision on isolation is made by the treating doctor taking into account the pre-test probability of COVID being the cause of their symptoms. If you are considered to have a high risk of COVID then we will place you in “medical quarantine”, advise the EMNI Incident Controller and discuss your case with a public health physician in Sydney.

Please note that a negative swab result may not mean that a person can safely go out in public or return to work. This depends on their clinical condition and the type of work they do. Medical quarantine is continued until a negative test is obtained or the patient becomes well - whichever is the longest. A doctor assesses the case and advises the EMNI Incident Controller, who makes the decision on the release of that person.

To summarise, we have strict criteria for using on-site COVID tests. The treating doctor will make the decision on whether to use on-island testing but may discuss with me if required. These are a precious resource that we need to conserve to guarantee the community's safety in case of an outbreak.

If you or your employer considers you to be essential to the functioning of the infrastructure on Norfolk, you will need to provide evidence and consideration will be made on whether your test should be done on-site. NIHRACS will make the final decision on this.

Thank you for your cooperation – we continue to work with everyone to keep us all safe

Dr Michelle Bonnici
20 August 2020

Visiting Eye Specialist Update

NIHRACS has been working closely with the Norfolk Island Support Team based at South East Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) to organise and schedule an Ophthalmic specialist visit for Norfolk Island patients. Unfortunately visits scheduled for both May and August have had to be postponed due to COVID-19 border restrictions. Two Ophthalmologists (Eye Specialists) from Sydney Eye Hospital working under Professor Peter McCluskey have agreed to regular visits to Norfolk and we are liaising with them to schedule a visit for both at the same time in September.

In the meantime and if further delays prevent visits in September the NIHRACS GPs and GP Clinic are reviewing the Ophthalmic patients as required and organising treatment via telehealth or with alternative providers. Please be reassured that all decisions are being made from a patient care perspective and take into consideration the protection of the Norfolk Island community whilst also ensuring that NIHRACS patients receive essential treatment.

General Practice Clinic Update

Due to the current restrictions due to the risk of COVID-19 the main entry to NIHRACS is currently locked however the General Practice clinic is still open for business for all your health care needs and our emergency department is still operating. To decrease the risk of COVID-19 our processes have changed and Medicare is providing 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 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.

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

Child Health Clinic

Child Health Clinic will now be run from the GP Clinic every Thursday, 8:30am to 4pm by Janine. This clinic is for 0 – 5 year olds and includes: Developmental Assessment, Baby Growth Checks, Emotional and Social Development, Breastfeeding Support, Settling/Sleep Support and Introducing solids.

Smoking Cessation Clinic

It's hard to stop, but with help and support, you can quit smoking.

Quitting smoking can be one of the most difficult, yet rewarding, things a person can do. Most smokers say they would like to quit, and may have tried at least once. Some are successful the first time, but others try a number of times before they finally give up for good.

It might take time, it can be hard as your body has become dependent on nicotine, but many people have succeeded in giving up smoking. Become one of them by making a quit plan

The clinic will provide a proven approach to assisting people who wish to either quit smoking or cut down. Every cigarette not smoked is doing good for smokers' health. The clinic uses a multidisciplinary approach to match individual needs.

To make a booking for the smoking cessation clinic call the GP Clinic on 24134.

Flu Vaccines - Get in quick, stocks are limited!

In light of the current health climate, NIHRACS encourages all community members to obtain a flu vaccination. Influenza is a serious illness and can be fatal. Protection against influenza is highest in the first three to four months after vaccination. Getting vaccinated in April or May allows protection during the peak influenza transmission period, which runs from around June to September in most parts of Australia.

It is never too late to vaccinate since influenza can circulate in the community all year round.

There are currently no vaccines that protect against COVID 19.

Whilst influenza vaccine will not prevent coronavirus infection it can reduce the severity and spread of influenza, which may make a person more susceptible to other respiratory illnesses like coronavirus.

Cost of the Flu vaccination is \$20 each.

We are conducting these via appointments only please phone the GP Clinic on 22091 to book your appointment.



All patient information is treated as confidential.

Protocol for Visitors entering NIHRACS

- All visitors must be screened at the hospital entrance as per the current screening protocol
- All visitors coming into the Aged Care Facility must have received the current 2020 Flu Vaccine
- All visitors must sign in at the Nurses Station and list a contact phone number
- Hand hygiene before and after visiting must be carried out
- Only 1 visitor at a time (2 visitors if providing end of life support)
- Visits by family, friends or carer to be held in the resident or patient's room
- For our Residents in the Aged Care Facility, please stay in touch remotely with your loved ones, if unable to visit. Phone calls utilising technology (messenger) letters or cards will certainly brighten their day.

Thank you for your understanding during these difficult /uncertain times.

Phyllis Evans. Nurse Unit Manager

Health and Wellbeing Weekly Update

A reminder of the key COVID-19 prevention messages:

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

Hints and Tips for those in Isolation on Norfolk

A new resource has been put together to be given to people arriving on Norfolk who are required to self-isolate or those in medical quarantine. It is a compilation of information from a range of sources and can be found on the NIHRACS website: www.norfolkislandhealth.gov.nf under the Health and wellbeing tab.

Staying Healthy Living Well Starting again

Staying Healthy Living Well (SHLW) is a FREE 12-week program that started on Norfolk in July 2019 and has proven successful for those who participated. It went into recess due to COVID-19 but we are starting up again. This program helps people with a chronic health condition (present for more than 6 months) to understand more about their health and will share ideas, tips and approaches to becoming more confident in monitoring health and general wellbeing at home. Delivered by Feros Care and funded by Central and Eastern Sydney PHN, participants will be provided with a senior friendly easy to use touch-screen computer and measuring devices so they can record their vital signs (like your blood pressure, oxygen levels and blood sugars) each day. The results will be transmitted securely and privately to a Telehealth Nurse who will monitor and speak with participants regularly. Feros Care will also provide a print out of results to be shared with participant's GP. All this without leaving the comfort of your own home.

If you are interested in participating please ring Carter Stormann, SHLW Local Coordinator on 22687 or 53026 or email carter.stormann@hospital.gov.nf.

The National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS)

Just a reminder that the Burnt Pine Pharmacy is now a Local Access Point for the NDSS. This scheme is an initiative of the Australian Government and is administered by Diabetes Australia. It provides diabetes health information and resources as well as subsidised products. If you live with diabetes and are on insulin and/or have been advised by your health professional to test your blood glucose levels then you should be registered with NDSS. It is free and you will need to be registered in order to access the scheme.

If you are not currently registered you can make an appointment with the Chronic Disease Nurse at the GP Clinic who will assist you with getting registered. For more information on NDSS contact Karen Innes-Walker on 22687 or karen.walker@hospital.gov.nf or visit the NDSS website <https://www.ndss.com.au/>

Bowel Cancer Rates Increasing in Under 50 year olds

Did you know, the rates for bowel cancer have been declining among adults over 50, but rising in adults UNDER 50?

Unfortunately, young-onset patients are more likely to be diagnosed with bowel cancer in Stage 3 or 4, when the disease is harder to treat. Missed symptoms and misdiagnosis can often delay the correct diagnosis in young-onset cases.

It is a common misconception that bowel cancer is 'an old person's disease', but the reality is that you should never be told that you are too young to have bowel cancer.

Around 1 in 10 Australians diagnosed with bowel cancer are under the age of 50.

Early stage bowel cancer may show no obvious symptoms. Listen to your body and talk to your GP if you know something is not right. Seek a second opinion if needed.

For around 30% of all bowel cancer cases diagnosed there is a family history, hereditary contribution or a combination of both.

Diet and lifestyle choices, as well as screening and surveillance, can also influence your bowel cancer risk.

For further details visit <https://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org>