

## COVID-19 information for people who are immunocompromised

This information sheet should be used in conjunction with information from the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#), [HealthyWA website](#) and the [Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy](#).

### How to live with COVID-19 and omicron – taking precautions

#### 1. How many COVID-19 vaccine doses should I have?

- People who are immunocompromised should receive **4 doses** of a COVID-19 vaccine
  - Immunocompromised people require [3 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine in their primary course](#); this is an extra dose compared to the standard advice for the general community. The 3<sup>rd</sup> dose should be an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna), regardless of what vaccine you received for the first 2 doses, and can be given two months after the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose.
  - You should also receive a **booster (4<sup>th</sup>) dose** of COVID-19 vaccine [four months after your 3<sup>rd</sup> dose](#). The timing of the booster will reduce to three months in February, please check for government updates.
- [You can ask for advice from your doctor about whether to plan the timing of your vaccine doses around any potential changes to your treatment, but you \*\*should not stop taking any regular medications before or after your COVID vaccines unless discussed with your doctor.\*\*](#)

#### 2. How can I reduce my and my family's risk of COVID-19?

- Sanitise your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your face
- Wear a mask when interacting with others, and consider using a high quality medical grade N95 mask
- [Improve ventilation](#) of indoor areas that you share with other people
- Avoid unnecessary exposure to public places
  - Crowded, poorly ventilated indoor enclosed spaces are higher risk for COVID-19 transmission than outdoor areas
  - Arrange for shopping home delivery or have a family member obtain your groceries for you
  - Arrange telehealth medical appointments for routine check-ups or medication prescriptions
  - Arrange travel in private vehicles with members of your household
  - Ask your employer if you can work from home
- Seek medical attention and get tested if you have had contact with a person who has COVID-19 or if you develop symptoms

#### 3. What if I need to visit a public setting such as the shopping centre or medical appointment in hospital?

- Practice social distancing and avoid busy areas

- Wait outside (or in an open well ventilated area) where possible
- Upgrade your mask to a high quality medical grade mask such as a N95 mask
  - If this is not possible double mask with surgical mask and cloth mask
- Use hand sanitiser prior to touching your mask
- Avoid touching your face as much as possible

#### **4. What if I need to travel and cannot avoid public transportation?**

- When travelling on public transportation (e.g. airplane, train or bus) upgrade your mask to a high quality medical grade mask such as a N95 mask
  - If this is not possible double mask with surgical mask and cloth mask
- Use hand sanitiser prior to touching your mask
- Avoid touching your face as much as possible
- Avoid eating while travelling on public transport or eat once everyone else has put their mask back on
- When travelling by car, bus or train try to sit next to an open window where ventilation is best

#### **5. What if I am unable to complete my work from home?**

- Talk to your employer about your circumstances; a letter from your doctor may help
- Ensure your [workspace is well ventilated](#) and allows for appropriate social distancing
- Upgrade your mask to a high quality medical grade mask such as N95 or double mask

#### **6. What are the differences between different types of masks?**

- Face masks reduce the spread of COVID-19 by reducing both the amount of the virus that is released into the air by a person with COVID-19, and that is breathed in by people who are in close contact with an infected person.
- Fabric masks are the least effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and are not recommended for people who are immunocompromised.
- The effectiveness of a mask depends on how well the material filters virus particles in the air, and how well the mask fits around the nose and mouth of the person wearing it.
- High quality medical grade respirators (that is, masks that fit snugly around the nose and mouth) are the most effective masks, as they filter most virus particles from the air and stop unfiltered air from leaking around the sides of the mask.
- Masks are labelled as “N95” regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Registered brands can be searched on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods website [here](#).
- N95 masks are recommended for use by healthcare workers at risk of exposure to COVID-19. Surgical masks are recommended in [current WA Health guidelines](#) for people who have risk factors for more severe COVID-19, however you may consider upgrading to an N95 respiratory in situations where there is a higher chance of contracting COVID-19.
- There are other masks labelled as “KN95” or “KF94” that are not regulated in Australia but may provide better protection than a surgical mask by providing a better seal around the nose and mouth, and better filtration by the mask material.

- There are videos available online with instructions on how to put on and take off different types of respirators ([Overview](#), [KN95 cupped respirator](#), [N95/P2 duckbill](#), [flat fold respirator](#), [P2/N95 foldable](#), [P2/N95 cupped respirator](#)), and advice on how they may be reused.
- N95 masks are more expensive than surgical masks, however they may be reusable if they are not damaged or visibly contaminated. Make sure you sanitise your hands before taking off your mask, and then immediately again after you remove it. You can store your mask somewhere to dry out (i.e. not in a sealed plastic bag) and use it again a few days later, up to 5 times.

**7. Ensure all family members and household contacts are vaccinated and have received their booster shots**

- Everyone 5 years and older can now [book an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- Booster doses are available to everyone 18 years and older who have received the primary course of COVID-19 vaccines  $\geq$  4 months ago

**8. What are the benefits of booster shots?**

- COVID-19 boosters reduce the risk of infection with the omicron variant, with the benefits starting within days of receiving the booster shot
- People who have received a booster can still get COVID-19, but their infection will be less severe

**9. I am planning a social gathering with family/friends – what should I do to stay safe?**

- Ask anyone who has symptoms (runny nose, cough, fever or unwell) to stay at home
- Ensure all attendees are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 if they are eligible and that those vaccinated receive the booster shot
- Once available ask guests to obtain a rapid antigen test in the hours prior to the gathering, alternatively a laboratory PCR test could be used however this does not ensure that the person has not been infected in the meantime
- Ask guests not to attend if they have been to COVID-19 exposure sites (high risk)
- Encourage attendees to reduce activities that might potentially expose them to the virus (e.g. public transport, shopping centres) 72 hours before the gathering
- Encourage guests to use hand sanitiser when they enter
- Don't share cups and utensils or serve finger foods
- Gather outside, or if not possible open windows to improve ventilation
- You should send your guests [this information](#) before the gathering

**10. I am planning a social gathering at my household - what if some people attending are not vaccinated?**

- Given that omicron is highly contagious we would discourage any unvaccinated persons from visiting your household.
- If you must spend time with an unvaccinated person we recommend you do so outside, socially distanced and wearing masks.

- Consider asking all guests to complete a negative rapid antigen test a few hours before the event to reduce your risk of exposure

**11. What if someone has been infected with COVID-19 before but has not been vaccinated – does that mean they have natural immunity?**

- Studies have shown that previous COVID-19 infection is not very effective in protecting a person from re-infection, particularly with the omicron variant
- All people should receive COVID-19 vaccinations to prevent spread as well as protect against severe infection with COVID-19 and omicron.

**12. What should I do if I become exposed to COVID-19 in the community?**

- You should follow any public health advice on testing and isolation if you have been exposed to COVID-19.
- You should also contact your doctor for further advice on whether any additional testing may be recommended depending on your situation. The advice on when to have a COVID-19 test, and which sort of test you should have, is frequently changing and your doctor will be able to give you up to date advice.
- Lung Transplant recipients and immunocompromised patients should contact the Advanced Lung Disease and Lung Transplant Unit for advice.
- **Anyone requiring a COVID swab should attend a COVID clinic. A full list of locations is available on the Healthy WA website.**
- **Drop ins to the ALDU clinic for testing are NOT permitted.**

**13. What if I become unwell with COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat and shortness of breath)?**

- You should have a COVID-19 test, isolate and contact your doctor as soon as possible (even if you are still waiting for your result). Lung Transplant recipients and immunocompromised patients should contact the Advanced Lung Disease and Lung Transplant Unit for advice.
- If you feel short of breath, or feel very unwell in any other way, you should go to your nearest emergency department.

**14. What should I do if I have a positive COVID-19 test?**

- Even if you have no or mild symptoms, you should contact your doctor as soon as possible if you get COVID-19.
- The management of COVID-19 in people who are immunocompromised or have other risk factors for more severe disease may be different to the advice provided to the general community, so you should contact your doctor (GP or hospital specialist) as soon as possible to make sure you are given the right advice for your situation. As stated above all Lung Transplant recipients and immunocompromised patients should contact the Advanced Lung Disease and Lung Transplant Unit for advice regarding management for all positive results.

### **15. Management of medical appointments and tests.**

- Where possible all appointments will be completed via health direct or phone from your home.
- If you are advised to attend for tests or appointments, you should only attend at the time allocated to you. Unless essential, you should attend alone. The aim of these measures is to reduce the number of people in the waiting room and the potential number of people you would be exposed to.

### **16. Additional information**

- Lung transplant recipients should ensure their home spirometer is in working order and perform regular checking of spirometry. It is important to understand what your baseline spirometry (FEV1) result is to aid in monitor for change and assist with your care provided via phone appointments.
- Patients requiring routine blood tests, should identify where their local Pathwest specimen collection centre is, ensure you have a request form and identify early when you will attend to testing.
- Ensure you have ample supply of medications. If scripts are required, please email [FSH.AdvancedLungDiseaseOutpatientClinic@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:FSH.AdvancedLungDiseaseOutpatientClinic@health.wa.gov.au) with clear instruction of what medication you require, when it is required by and which community pharmacy you wish us to fax the script too. If the medication is to be dispensed from FSH pharmacy please be clear when you will collect (there may be an option to have medication posted to your home address).
- **Patients should not drop into clinic unexpected.**

### **17. Clinic contact details for Lung Transplant Patients.**

- Clinic phone 6152 4029 (general office hours are 8am to 4pm)
- Nurse phone (Sharon) 6152 1609 (office hours)
- Email : [FSH.AdvancedLungDiseaseOutpatientClinic@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:FSH.AdvancedLungDiseaseOutpatientClinic@health.wa.gov.au) (used for scripts, sending through reports, or non-urgent matters only).
- Afterhours, call the FSH switch: 6152 2222 and ask to speak to the Advanced Lung Disease Registrar on call (this is for patients known to the ALDU @ FSH only).
- Remember – if you need urgent treatment, call St John Ambulance and communication with the Advanced Lung Team can be managed later.