



COVID-19 guidelines for outpatient services

Phase 4 COVID response

Purpose

Delivering healthcare while protecting patients, families and staff is a priority for all hospitals in Western Australia (WA). This includes the delivery of outpatient services, which have been impacted by the response to COVID-19. Recent changes to COVID-19 measures and restrictions have necessitated a further update to our *COVID-19 Guidelines for Outpatient Services*.

These guidelines aim to provide a COVID-19 framework for outpatient services in hospital settings that align with the current phase of COVID-19 restrictions. These guidelines will continue to be reviewed and updated in line with changes to COVID-19 measures and restrictions to minimise the risk of spread of COVID-19 in WA.

Background

Outpatient services provide patients with access to:

- medical specialists for diagnostic assessment, screening and treatment
- allied health, nursing and midwifery services
- support for ongoing management of chronic and complex conditions
- pre- and post- hospital care

The ongoing use of telehealth and virtual care will enable continued provision of outpatient care through the changing phases of COVID-19 restrictions.

Key considerations for outpatient services and COVID-19

Models of care and digital technology

Outpatient services should continue to review models of care, including the use of digital technology modalities, and incorporate risk assessment and mitigation processes including those listed below.

- Continuing to prioritise digitally enabled models of care (including telehealth outpatient services) into the home, closer to home and within virtual group and community settings where clinically appropriate and technically viable. The increased availability and uptake of digital health care during the COVID-19 response has been significant and has enabled services to continue.
- Review clinic scheduling and physical set up to encourage physical distancing where possible. Ensure, where possible, there is adequate space for people to keep 1.5 meters away from each other.

Infection prevention and control

- Hospital sites should continue to implement practices to ensure infection prevention and control (IP&C) measures are stringently followed as per the guidelines on [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in Western Australian Healthcare facilities](#) (IP&C guidelines) when delivering outpatient services. This includes both standard precautions (e.g. hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and environmental cleaning) and transmission-based precautions as required.
- Measures to encourage good personal hygiene should be considered by all outpatient services, including access to hand washing facilities and/or alcohol-based hand sanitiser and signage to encourage frequent hand hygiene and cough etiquette.

Physical distancing

Outpatient services should continue to implement physical distancing measures and should:

- Eliminate the need for face-to-face contact through the continuation of digital health care delivery where clinically appropriate and technically possible.
- Ensure there is adequate space to allow physical distancing (1.5 meters away from each other) between people in reception areas, waiting rooms and consultation rooms, for example by spacing chairs, using floor markings and signage.
- Support patients to be accompanied by a relative and/or carer (subject to site-specific guidance).
- Ensure clinic profiles, schedules and booking practices reflect an appropriate number of patients per room and establish management plans for those who arrive with relatives /carers/escorts to promote physical spacing within clinic spaces including reception, waiting rooms, consultation rooms and group activity venues.

Outpatient process and COVID-19

1. Pre-outpatient appointment

Patients should be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and any self-quarantine requirements prior to attendance at outpatient appointments. Hospitals should continue to follow their local operational COVID-19 screening and IP&C guidelines.

For patients who meet COVID-19 suspect or confirmed case criteria:

- If clinically appropriate and technically possible, consider changing the outpatient to a telehealth/virtual appointment using a digital health modality e.g. telephone, videoconferencing.
- If a digital health modality is not indicated, rescheduling of the appointment is recommended pending a negative test result or after the 14-day isolation period (if clinically appropriate). If this is not possible, continue to the guidelines below.

2. At the outpatient clinic appointment

Outpatient services should continue with established COVID-19 screening processes when patients present for their appointments. For example, place signage at reception asking patients if they have symptoms, are awaiting COVID-19 test results, have been overseas or interstate in the last 14 days, or have been in contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

- If an outpatient appointment is unable to be rescheduled and the patient is presenting with COVID-19-like symptoms, proceed with the appointment following the transmission-based precautions and environmental cleaning as outlined in the [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in Western Australian Healthcare facilities](#). Following clinical assessment, send the patient to a COVID-19 testing clinic.
- If patients are clinically unwell; direct the patient to the Emergency Department. **Note that notification of the patients COVID-19 status is required for attendance at the Emergency Department.*
- If a patient requires clinical assessment before transfer to COVID-19 testing clinic or Emergency Department, follow transmission-based precautions and environment cleaning as outlined in [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in Western Australian Healthcare facilities](#).
- For patients who meet screening criteria, staff should provide a mask for the patient to wear; and inform their manager for further advice and follow-up.
- Patients can be accompanied by a relative and/or carer who should also comply with IP&C criteria.

3. Post patient attendance

Following an appointment, if the outpatient service is advised that a patient has developed COVID-19 symptoms or has been confirmed as COVID-19 positive, staff are to contact their manager and IP&C team to ensure exposure management procedures are followed as specified by relevant guidelines.

Document guidance

WA Health Central Referral Service Policy

<https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/Policy-Frameworks/Clinical-Services-Planning-and-Programs/Policy/Central-Referral-Allocation-Outpatient-Services/Supporting/Central-Referral-Service-Policy.pdf>

WA Health Specialist Outpatient Services Access Policy

<https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/Policy-Frameworks/Clinical-Services-Planning-and-Programs/Policy/Specialist-Outpatient-Services-Access-Policy/Supporting/Specialist-Outpatient-Services-Access-Policy.pdf>

Elective Surgery Access and Waiting List Management Policy

<https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/About-us/Policy-frameworks/Clinical-Services-Planning-and-Programs/Mandatory-requirements/Elective-Services/Elective-Surgery-Access-and-Waiting-List-Management-Policy>

COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in Western Australian Healthcare Facilities

<https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Corp/Documents/Health-for/Infectious-disease/COVID19/COVID19-Infection-Prevention-and-Control-in-Hospitals.pdf>

Authority

Department of Health, Western Australia.

Acknowledgements

This guideline is based on the current available knowledge of the transmission of coronaviruses and may change as more evidence becomes available specifically regarding COVID-19.

Further information

For the latest information on COVID-19, visit the [WA Health COVID-19 page](#).

Last Updated:	Last reviewed:	Changes:
10 Aug 2020	21 Dec 2020	Nil Changes

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

© Department of Health 2020

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.