



# COVID-19 and elective surgery

What you need to know

9 July 2020

## What is being done to keep me safe and reduce my risk of COVID-19 infection if I go to hospital for elective surgery or a procedure?

All Victorian hospitals follow national standards which aim to keep people safe and provide good care.

Our hospitals follow national guidelines to prevent the spread of infections and to keep patients safe. During coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic you will notice that hospital staff may be using personal protective equipment (like gloves, gowns, masks and face/eye shields) to keep you safe.

Your hospital will also follow specific guidance for use of personal protective equipment for patients with coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you have coronavirus (COVID-19), having planned elective surgery may not be the best and safest option for you. Before your surgery, the health service will help you decide if you are at risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19), and if you should be tested.

Currently, if you live in, or work in a Stage 3 restriction zone or other known coronavirus (COVID-19) hotspot, you will be recommended to be tested prior to surgery, and be asked to self-isolate until you go to hospital for surgery.

## How will I find out if I am at risk of having COVID-19?

Knowing your risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19) will help keep you safe. Health care workers will assess your risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19) by asking questions about travel history, your residence, contact with someone who has tested positive, and whether you have any symptoms, and by checking your temperature. The questions they ask are to make sure your surgery is as safe as possible and to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) to health care workers.

If you or your health care worker are concerned that you might have coronavirus (COVID-19), they will ask further questions about any possible exposure or contacts. Sometimes they might need to check you do not have another illness or infection.

If you live in or work in a Stage 3 restriction zone or any other hotspot, the health service will ask you to have a coronavirus (COVID-19) test prior to your procedure. You will also be asked to self-isolate after the test to avoid being exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19) before your admission to hospital. This is to keep you safe ahead of your surgery.

On the day you are having surgery, a health care worker will ask you these questions again. If you have not been asked these questions before the day of surgery, you must let staff know. If you have any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) on the day of surgery, you may be tested again.

## Do I need to be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) or stay isolated before my surgery or procedure?

You should only have elective surgery or a procedure if you are well enough.

When your health service recommends that you have a coronavirus (COVID-19) test, they will provide you with further instructions on how and where to do this.

After testing, it is advisable to stay isolated from others by having no visitors to your home, other than household members, until you go for your surgery or procedure. This will reduce your risk of getting coronavirus (COVID-19) after testing.

If you develop any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) after you have been tested and before your day of surgery, you should seek advice and get tested. Symptoms to watch out for are: fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss of smell or taste.

Some patients who are particularly vulnerable will be asked to self-isolate for longer periods – up to 14 days before their surgery – to reduce the risk of becoming infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) as much as possible. This is for your safety.

## What questions should I ask my health care worker about my surgery?

It is important that you know:

- Why (or if) it is recommended you have the surgery or procedure at this time
- The risks and benefits of having the surgery or procedure
- The expected outcomes from the procedure
- The specific risks that apply to you
- The actions that will be taken to reduce your risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) and other infections, as well as other complications
- What may happen if you decide not to have the surgery or procedure now
- How urgent is the procedure and any risks of your condition deteriorating if it is delayed
- If there are any other treatment options other than the proposed surgery or procedure.

## Are health services using physical distancing?

Physical distancing is not always possible in hospitals because of the need to get near to you, and touch you, to provide care. However, all of us – health care workers, patients, carers and visitors – should always stay at least 1.5 metres apart from each other, called physical distancing, wherever possible. This is really important before and after surgery or other procedures.

## What will happen if my health worker and I choose to postpone my surgery?

If your surgery or procedure does not go ahead, ask your health care worker about what will happen next. Your health care team will work to ensure your surgery is rescheduled (booked in again) as soon as is safe for you.

Rescheduling will depend on the following:

- your health condition, your safety, and needs (you should discuss any questions with your surgical team)
- the likelihood of your condition getting worse whilst waiting
- the availability of your surgical team and health service
- government policies that are introduced for the benefit and protection of patients, healthcare workers and the community

## What should I do if I come into contact with a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Ring your GP or the coronavirus hotline (1800 675 398).

**Do not** go to the hospital or GP clinic until you have phoned them first for advice.

It will be important for your safety that the hospital knows whether you have become infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) before surgery even if at the time of surgery, you have no symptoms.

## Where can I find out more information?

Victorian updates: [coronavirus.gov.au](https://coronavirus.gov.au)

National updates: [health.gov.au/news/latest-information-about-novel-coronavirus](https://health.gov.au/news/latest-information-about-novel-coronavirus)

\*This factsheet is based upon current research and will be continuously updated as new evidence becomes available. *Adapted from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare, [FAQs for consumers on elective surgery](#)*

**If you are concerned please call the coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398**