



Coronavirus (COVID-19) paediatric elective and emergency surgery or procedure - Advice for parents/guardians 17 July 2020

What is being done to keep my child safe if they need to have elective/emergency surgery or a procedure during COVID-19?

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 (also known as PPE, which can include gloves, gowns, masks and face/eye shields) to keep your child safe.

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

If your child has COVID-19, having elective/ emergency surgery or a procedure under a general anaesthetic may not be the best and safest option for them. Before their surgery or procedure, your health service will decide if your child is at risk of having COVID-19 and needs testing.

Currently, if your child lives or works in a Stage 3 restriction zone or another known stay at home area, they will need to be tested for COVID-19 if they are having a general anaesthetic for elective/ emergency surgery or a procedure.

After testing, they will need to stay at home and isolate to reduce their risk of getting COVID-19 before their surgery or procedure.

How will I find out if my child is at risk of having COVID-19?

Knowing your child's risk of having COVID-19 will help keep them safe. Healthcare workers will assess your child's risk of having COVID-19 by checking their temperature and by asking questions about:

- where and who your child lives with, including any living arrangements in an alternative residence for example with another parent/non-custodial parent/guardian/adoptive or foster parent
- whether your child has any fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss of smell or taste
- your child's travel history
- whether your child has had contact with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19 or tested positive for COVID-19
- if your child has any other illnesses or infections.

These questions help healthcare workers decide if your child needs a COVID-19 test before coming to hospital for surgery or a procedure and make sure your child's surgery or procedure is as safe as possible. It is also important to try and reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to healthcare workers.

Your child should only have elective surgery or a procedure if they are well enough.

Does my child need a COVID-19 test before their elective/ emergency surgery or procedure?

Your child's treating team at the health service where your child is going to have their surgery or procedure will advise you of whether your child needs a COVID-19 test.

If your child develops any symptoms of COVID-19 it is important that you notify your child's treating team for their safety.

Symptoms of COVID-19 to watch for are: fever, chills or sweats, cough sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss of smell or taste.

If your child needs a COVID-19 test before elective surgery or a procedure, it will usually need to be performed **five days** before their elective surgery or procedure to allow time for their test result to be available before coming to hospital. Ask your child's treating team for advice about where your child should have their COVID-19 test before their surgery, usually this is at the hospital where your child is having their surgery or at a private pathology service.

Healthcare workers at your hospital will advise if the COVID-19 test can be done closer to the day of surgery if the result can be available sooner.

Your child's treating team will discuss with you and your child, as age appropriate, what will happen next if they should have had a COVID-19 test but did not. This will depend on your child's clinical condition. They may need to have a COVID-19 test on the day of their surgery or procedure or have their surgery or procedure postponed.

How can I help prepare my child before they have a COVID-19 test?

What should we expect?

Your child will need to have a swab taken from the back of their throat and their nose, which shouldn't take much time. Your healthcare workers will explain to you and your child, as age appropriate, what this involves.

How can I help my child to understand about the test and COVID-19?

Watch The Royal Children's hospital video A child's guide to hospital: COVID-19 test to see a child having the test and hear about her experience @ [https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_\(COVID-19\)/](https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_(COVID-19)/) with your child, if age appropriate.

Use age-appropriate language and be honest with them when explaining what will happen.

Be positive, supportive and use a reassuring calm tone to minimise any potential anxiety or stress.

Advise your healthcare workers if your child has special needs, so they can know how to best help your child.

Do parents or other household members need a COVID-19 test before their child has elective surgery or procedure?

Parents and other household members do not need to have a COVID-19 test before their child has elective surgery or a procedure.

What questions should I ask my health care workers about my child's surgery?

It is important that you know:

- why it is recommended your child has the surgery or procedure and the expected outcomes
- if there are any other treatment options other than the proposed surgery or procedure
- the risks and benefits of having the surgery or procedure postponed
- what are the risks of your child's condition deteriorating if it is delayed
- the actions that will be taken to reduce your child's risk of COVID-19 and other infections, as well as other complications.

Are health services using physical distancing?

All of us, healthcare workers, patients, carers and visitors, should always perform hand hygiene regularly and stay at least 1.5 metres apart from each other, called physical distancing, wherever possible. In hospitals because of the need to have close contact with your child or you to provide care, physical distancing is not always possible. This is really important before and after surgery or other procedures.

What will happen if my healthcare workers and I choose to postpone my child's surgery?

If your child's surgery or procedure does not go ahead, ask your healthcare workers about what will happen next.

Rescheduling will depend on the following:

- your child's health, their condition and any specific needs
- the likelihood of your child's condition getting worse whilst waiting
- the availability of your child's 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 my child comes into contact with a suspected or confirmed case of 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 your child and their family have become infected with COVID-19 before surgery even if your child has no symptoms at the time of surgery.

Where can I find out more information?

Victorian Department of Health and Human Services updates

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

Raising Children's Network @ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>

Monash Children's Hospital @ <https://monashchildrenshospital.org/coronavirus-a-guide-for-parents/>

The Royal Children's Hospital @ [https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_\(COVID-19\)/](https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_(COVID-19)/)

National updates: @ https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert?utm_source=health.gov.au&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=digital_transformation&utm_content=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