

Coronavirus Covid19 – Immunosuppressed patients and children

What is coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19. Lots of people are concerned about the spreading infection of covid-19 becoming widespread and the impact it will have on the community.

Covid-19 – the facts for children

So far, covid-19 has not been found in many people in the Australian community, but that is likely to change and become more common.

When children do become infected it is a less severe disease.

There have been very few deaths in children and teenagers overseas.

Children can spread the infection to their grandparents and older people though and those at higher risk of becoming very unwell seem to include the elderly, especially those with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease).

Covid-19 – the facts for children on immune suppression medicines

We have not found any evidence from overseas that children or young people taking immunosuppressive medications are at higher risk of becoming very unwell, although this is possible.

The issues are similar to the annual wave of flu infections.

At the moment there is no vaccine for coronavirus.

What are the symptoms of coronavirus?

The symptoms of coronavirus are:

- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath

However, these symptoms do not necessarily mean you have the illness (they are similar to lots of other colds and viruses).

Unless you have had close contact with someone known to be infected with the covid-19 virus, it is much more likely to be due to a more common cold or flu virus.

What can you do to protect your child's health?

Good hygiene

- Wash your hands!
- Do it often - and sing a song for 20 seconds.
- Teach your kids to wash their hands.
- You can use alcohol hand wash, but most of all hand washing is very effective.

Cough into your elbow (or cover your mouth & nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze)
- then wash your hands.

Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth.

Stay home if you are sick

- If your child is unwell they should stay home.
- You can ring your GP for advice.
- Do not just go to your GP if you are concerned you or your child has coronavirus – please ahead call first. **This is important.**
- The DHHS coronavirus hotline is 1800 675 398 for further advice.
- You can also contact your RCH team on rheumatology.team@rch.org.au

Other steps

- Get the usual yearly flu vaccine when it becomes available.
- Consider pneumococcal vaccination in appropriate patients.
- There is no need to stockpile medications as our medications are sourced widely.
- Avoid travel to areas of high infection rate.

Should I keep my child off school?

We would not recommend avoiding school, unless there is specific advice for a school to close.

Should I stop giving immunosuppression medications to my child?

We would recommend to continue giving the immunosuppression medicines to your child so their disease does not flare.

If you are concerned your child is very unwell with any serious infection it is sensible to follow our usual advice to pause the immunosuppression medicines, contact the Rheumatology team and we would usually restart them again once your child is recovering.

There is no need to pause medicines for a simple cold.

The main medication that should not be stopped without medical advice is **prednisolone (steroids)** as your body needs steroids when unwell and may in fact not be able to make natural steroids as effectively if a child has recently been taking prednisolone.

It is sensible to keep up to date with information from the Department of Health about coronavirus: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>