

COVID-19 Pathways of Care

Summary for General Practice

August 2022



Introduction

The following COVID-19 pathways of care summary provides details of the Queensland Health patient-initiated COVID-19 care for General Practitioners.

The model provides pathways for people who seek advice for treatment of COVID-19 following a positive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, rapid antigen test (RAT) or if they feel unwell with COVID-19 symptoms. The model commences with the patient engaging in a risk assessment of their choice, the outcome of which streams the patient's clinical risk (low, medium, high or emergency) and directs the patient to the appropriate level of care.

The patient-initiated COVID-19 care model is person-focused and aims to improve the healthcare experience by providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

For severe symptoms (such as worsening breathlessness, chest pain or tightness) phone 000 and inform QAS of COVID positive status of the patient.

COVID-19 Pathways of Care

The patient-initiated COVID-19 pathways of care model features include:

- An expanded triage system and virtual care model to better manage demand and resources.
- People can check their symptoms and access the care they need.
- People with COVID-19 or COVID-19 symptoms complete a 'risk assessment' and are directed to one of four care pathways.

Patient-initiated risk assessment options

1. National Coronavirus Helpline

The National Coronavirus Helpline delivered by healthdirect Australia is an inbound triage and assessment service for people with COVID-19, or those with suspected COVID-19, accessed by phoning 1800 020 080. Information about this service can be accessed [via their website](#). The initial call may be answered by a non-clinical customer service operator; however, the call will be transferred to a clinical customer service operator where required.

The National Coronavirus Helpline offers an interpreter service for those people where English is not their first language.

Customer service operators ask questions about symptoms, risk factors and comorbidities, working through the risk stratification tool as per the National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce Guidelines (for both adult and paediatric consumers). The risk stratification process will identify the consumer's risk of deterioration as

either low, moderate or high risk (which requires emergent care from Triple Zero (000) as well as an option to access antivirals. For Queensland, the agreed risk stratification is:

- Low risk - the person is advised that they are likely to be able to manage their condition at home.
- Moderate risk - the person is advised to contact a doctor within 24 hours. A notification will be sent by secure messaging to the general practitioner for those people who consent and provide their GP's details. The GP notification does not imply medicolegal responsibility, as it is a notification and not a clinical referral.
- High risk - the person is advised that because of their symptoms and risk factors, there is a risk of developing a more serious illness. They are advised to monitor their symptoms closely, and that a healthcare provider from Queensland Health will be in contact in the next 24 hours.
- Antivirals – the person is advised they may be eligible for antivirals and to contact a doctor within 24 hours. A notification will be sent by secure messaging to the general practitioner for those people who consent and provide their GP's details. For those people without a regular GP, they will be asked if they would like a notification provided to a GP Respiratory Clinic. Healthdirect will send an SMS to the person advising a notification has been sent with the contact details of the practice. Queensland Health will capture the inbound triage and assessment service data via a dashboard. The dashboard will be accessed by Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) to follow up and assess people marked as high-risk and allocate them to an appropriate care stream.

2. Healthdirect Australia COVID-19 Symptom and Antiviral Eligibility Checker

Consumers who are unsure what kind of care they may need – if any – can use the healthdirect Australia COVID-19 Symptom and Antiviral Eligibility Checker available [via their website](#).

The checker uses the same risk stratification process as the National Coronavirus Helpline and will advise consumers if they are eligible for COVID-19 therapies and how to safely access these.

The Queensland Health COVID Care Self-Checker and Billie the Bot automated phone service have been discontinued, providing consumers with clear and consistent options for finding out more about their condition.

Patient journey outcomes from the risk stratification process

1. Low risk: self-care at home

People who phone the National Coronavirus Helpline or accurately complete the COVID-19 Symptom and Antiviral Eligibility Checker and have no risk factors identified are advised that they can self-care at home.

They are prompted to access information about managing their symptoms by visiting [Managing your symptoms | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](#) and receive no further communication from Queensland Health with regard to their isolation period.

2. Moderate Risk: COVID Care at Home with a GP or healthcare provider

People who are identified as at risk of developing a more serious illness are advised to monitor their symptoms closely.

- People identified as moderate risk are advised to contact a doctor within 24 hours.
- People's GPs are notified by secure messaging if the person has consented and provided details of their GP. The GP notification does not imply medicolegal responsibility as it is notification - not a clinical referral. Please note that the GP notification is only provided from healthdirect Australia for those who phone the National Coronavirus Helpline. The online symptom checker does not result in a GP notification.

3. High Risk: Management of high-risk people by HHSs

People who are assessed as high-risk require hospital-managed COVID-19 services.

Hospital-managed COVID-19 services for people assessed as high risk include management in the HHSs virtual ward, admission to hospital or ICU as required.

- People considered well but at high-risk will be managed in the HHS's Virtual Ward with regular monitoring.
- High-risk people requiring closer monitoring daily will be managed in the HHS's Hospital in the Home (HITH) service with face-to-face care in their home.
- The hospital-managed COVID-19 services via an HHS Virtual Ward may employ remote patient monitoring according to patient need, practicality and availability.
- People who require hospitalisation will be managed in the hospital ward or ICU as required.

4. Antivirals: Management of people who may be eligible for antivirals

- People are identified as potentially being eligible for antivirals and advised to contact a doctor within 24 hours.
- People's GPs are notified by secure messaging if the person has consented and provided details of their GP. The GP notification does not imply medicolegal responsibility as it is notification - not a clinical referral. Please note that the GP notification is only provided from healthdirect Australia for those who phone the National Coronavirus Helpline. The online symptom checker does not result in a GP notification.

Care escalation / de-escalation between general practice and hospital-managed COVID-19 services

Escalation and de-escalation pathways are in place to ensure that the care required can be delivered, and that capacity can be managed.

As a person's healthcare needs change, they can be moved to a different care pathway, e.g., from GP care to hospital-managed COVID care, or back from hospital-managed COVID care, to GP, if acute care is no longer required.

Escalation business rules have been developed, with each HHS customising these rules to suit their local environment. Please find the escalation and de-escalation diagrams [here](#).

For severe symptoms (such as worsening breathlessness, chest pain or tightness) phone 000 and inform

QAS of COVID positive status of the patient.

Referral and discharge process

When care needs to be escalated from GP to hospital-managed COVID-19 services, a phone call handover from the GP to the virtual ward/COVID-19 hospital service is expected, followed by a referral via secure messaging methods.

HealthPathways contains localised referral information. HealthPathways are available at the Queensland portal site URL: <https://qld.healthpathwayscommunity.org/>

To support the referral and transfer of care process, the Queensland General Practice Liaison (QGPL) Network has developed a [Referrals and transfer of care processes between General Practitioners and HHSs for COVID-19](#) document.

When a person is considered suitable for discharge from an HHS hospital-managed COVID-19 service / HHS virtual ward to self-care at home, transfer of care communication is provided to the person's nominated general practitioner via a discharge summary.

The transfer of care / discharge summary provided will detail either non-complex or complex patient with follow up recommendations to the GP as indicated.

Access to antivirals

[Oral medicines for COVID-19](#) are available for people at high risk of developing severe illness. These medicines can help prevent severe infection and should be started as soon as possible after symptoms develop.

The following cohorts may benefit from these medicines:

- 70 years of age or older
- 50 years of age or older, with two other risk factors for severe disease
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, 30 years of age or older with two other risk factors for severe disease
- 18 years or older and immunocompromised.

Risk factors for severe disease include:

- diabetes
- being overweight
- serious heart disease
- chronic respiratory disease
- chronic kidney disease
- a number of other serious health problems.

Try to identify early, those patients who may benefit from oral antivirals such as nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid) or molnupiravir (Lagevrio). A Nirmatrelvir/ritonavir [drug interaction checker](#) is available online. Local pharmacy [stock can also be checked online](#). Most pharmacies will accept an electronic prescription that can be collected by a friend or family member so the COVID-19-positive patient can remain in isolation.

For more information on COVID-19 therapies including treatment guidelines and request forms, please visit the [COVID-19 clinical guidelines website](#).

Consumer information

Information for consumers can be found on the [Queensland Government website](#). A range of consumer materials can also be downloaded and printed from the [Queensland Health Asset Library](#) (please do not share this link with patients).

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