Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new viral illness that has been classified as a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. It’s part of a large family of viruses that can cause similar illnesses like the common cold.

Everyone has a part to play to help stop the virus spreading, not only to protect ourselves’ but also to protect those in the wider community at higher risk of serious illness. We should all practice good hygiene including washing our hands regularly, using a tissue and covering our mouth when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding close contact with others when possible.

People with kidney disease, those on dialysis and those with a transplant should be aware that, just like with the flu, they are at a higher risk of severe symptoms and complications from COVID-19 than the general population.

Social or physical distancing
One way to slow the spread of viruses is physical distancing. For example:

- Stay at home as much as you can. See if working from home is an option for you or using other strategies to minimise physical contact with others. Remember to keep socially connected with others via the phone or social media.
- Avoid public gatherings if they’re not essential. Rethink that visit to have a coffee with friends.
- Keep a body-length distance (about 1.5 metres) between you and other people whenever possible.
- Minimise physical contact. No hugs, handshakes or kissing.

COVID-19 and Influenza (the flu)
There are currently no vaccines that protect against COVID-19. Whilst the flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19 infection, it can reduce the severity and spread of influenza, which may make a person more at risk to other illnesses like COVID-19. Flu vaccination is very important for people with kidney disease. Free vaccinations will be available to eligible Queenslanders from mid-April 2020.

Your kidney care
All public renal services are working to provide the best and safest care for all patients, and for their staff. Your renal service will be in contact with you with updates on your individual appointments and your kidney care needs. If you have any concerns, questions about appointments, or need information, please call your renal service.

If you do become unwell, or have symptoms that suggest COVID-19 infection, it’s important to be checked out early. For health advice, call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84), your local doctor (GP) or your renal service.

The symptoms of COVID-19 can be

Call your Renal Service first before coming in if you feel sick with fever, or have difficulty breathing, have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, or if you have recently been anyplace overseas. They will advise you on what to do.

For the latest patient and carer information on COVID-19 you can also:

- Phone 13 Health (13 43 25 84) - a confidential phone service that provides health advice to Queenslanders
- Visit the Kidney Health Australia website: www.kidney.org.au
- Phone the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 If you need some practical support to stay at home
- Visit the Queenslanders with a Disability Network for helpful tools: https://qdn.org.au/home/covid-19/make-a-plan/
Kidney appointments

Your renal service is providing additional care and support for all patients during this time including minimising the need for you to physically visit the hospital or kidney clinic. You may be offered appointments by phone or by telehealth. If you have any concerns, questions about appointments, or need information, please call your renal service.

If you have symptoms that suggest COVID-19 infection, please contact your renal service for advice regarding testing and any needs for extra support of your kidney disease. We also advise you to self-isolate (stay at home, do not go out) until you receive your test result, if you have had a COVID-19 test. If your symptoms worsen at home, please go to your nearest fever clinic (contact numbers below, please ring before you go) or your emergency department if you become very unwell.

Haemodialysis patients

Haemodialysis staff will be providing additional care and precautions for all patients during this time.

If your dialysis shift time or location needs to be changed, your dialysis unit will be in contact. If you have any concerns, questions about appointments, transportation issues, or need information, please call your dialysis unit.

If you are unwell, please remember to call your dialysis unit first before coming in for dialysis to help them give you the best care when you arrive.

If you have symptoms and a history that suggests COVID-19 infection, you will be tested. You will be contacted when your test results are available. This may take up to 48 hours but may be slightly longer. Whilst waiting for your test result, your dialysis unit will still provide you with all your usual care needs but will take extra precautions to help protect the other patients, staff and visitors in the dialysis unit. This could include having your dialysis in isolation. If you are otherwise well, you may go home after dialysis.

At home we advise you to self-isolate (stay at home, do not go out) until you receive your test result.

If your symptoms worsen at home, please go to your nearest fever clinic (contact numbers below, please ring before you go) or your emergency department if you become very unwell.

If you are on haemodialysis and have confirmed COVID-19

If you have confirmed COVID-19, your dialysis care will continue, although your dialysis unit will take extra precautions to help protect the other patients, staff and visitors in the unit. This could include having your dialysis done in isolation or dialysing with other patients who have also tested positive for COVID-19.

Home dialysis patients (home haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis)

Your home dialysis staff will be providing additional care and support for all home patients during this time. If you have any concerns, questions about appointments, or need information, please call your home therapy unit.

If you have symptoms that suggest COVID-19 infection, please contact your home therapy unit for advice regarding testing and any needs for extra support of your home dialysis. We advise you to self-isolate (stay at home, do not go out) until you receive your test result, if you have had a COVID-19 test. If your symptoms worsen at home, please go to your nearest fever clinic (contact numbers below, please ring before you go) or your emergency department if you become very unwell.

Kidney transplant patients

Your transplant staff will also be providing additional care and precautions for all transplant patients during this time, including minimising the need for you to physically visit the transplant clinic. You may be offered appointments by phone or by telehealth. If you have any concerns, questions about appointments, or need information, please call your renal service. Please remember to continue your medications as directed.

As for all patients, if you have symptoms or have concerns, please contact your nearest fever clinic (contact numbers below, please ring before you go), your transplant unit for advice, or your emergency department if you become very unwell.

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Your Renal Service contact number(s):

Your nearest Fever Clinic(s):