

COVID-19 UPDATE

We are living in difficult and challenging times.

The Foster and Toora Medical Centres, South Gippsland Hospital and Prom Country Aged Care (the Precinct) are united in their belief that **now** is the time for action and preparation.

We are working closely together to ensure that you, our community, are kept as safe as possible.

Although there is much we do not know yet about the virus, our medical experts and leaders do emphasise that we have a window of opportunity **right now** to delay the spread. If we are proactive then we can make a difference and minimise the effects of COVID-19 on our community.

We are all affected by this one way or another. We all need to work together. A fragmented approach invites trouble. The most important actions we can all take to reduce the likelihood of transmission of COVID-19 remain Handwashing and Social Distancing (more below). **Please, stay at home whenever possible. Avoid physical contact with others and 'bunker down'.**

Information and advice are changing daily. We will attempt to make our news articles as up-to-date as possible. Further information from trusted sources will be listed in the articles from each of the three members of the Precinct that follow. We encourage you to stay informed.

Finally, look after each other. Now is the time for our community spirit to shine. There is an understandable anxiety around which we need to counter by caring, offering to help and looking out for each other.

From Foster and Toora Medical Centres

PLEASE RING BEFORE ARRIVING; this is the most important thing we would like to emphasise.

When you ring for an appointment you will be asked a few more questions by our staff than usual.

Please tell them if you have a respiratory illness so we can direct you most appropriately.

We are asking patients to ring when they arrive for their appointment and stay in their cars. You will then be rung to come in when the doctor is ready.

(If you do not have a mobile please tell staff when making the appointment).

Many of our consults we will attempt to do by phone to diminish risk.

We are in the process of creating a drive-through facility for testing, and a section of the medical centre dedicated to only respiratory illness assessment. More details will follow.

There are very strict criteria for who should be tested for COVID-19. We have to adhere to these criteria; **only patients that meet these criteria will be swabbed.** There is a great deal of work occurring in the background to ensure that we have adequate supplies as there are already shortages.

Your understanding of this is appreciated.

If you have any urgent respiratory symptoms, call 000

General COVID-19 information can be found at: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

Or if you are concerned about non-urgent COVID-19-related symptoms call the COVID-19 Hotline on 1800 675 398

Please be aware that our staff (and indeed all health workers generally) are under unprecedented amounts of pressure, and are aware that this is only the beginning. They are doing a magnificent job.

We have set up a Facebook page (go to Foster and Toora medical centres) and we have updated our webpage at fostermedical.com.au. We will ensure that up-to-date and reliable information is posted at both. These have links to details on what various terms like social distancing and self-isolation mean. We will add links for what businesses can do also.

Can we leave you with the words of the WHO Chief who was in charge of the response to the Ebola crisis...

“ Be fast. Have no regrets. You must be the first mover. If you need to be right before you move, you will never win. Perfection is the enemy of the good when it comes to emergency management. Speed trumps perfection. “

From South Gippsland Hospital

The health precinct is collaborating to provide a coordinated response to manage the COVID19 pandemic, and have processes in place to protect residents, and screen and manage patients with suspected viral infections, such as COVID-19.

Broadly, the objectives of the Victorian public health response are to identify and manage cases of COVID-19 and any contacts, and the containment and reduction of the spread of COVID-19 infection.

The most important actions we can all take to reduce the likelihood of transmission of COVID19 remain **Handwashing and Social distancing**

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly.
- Stay home if you are sick and don't expose others. If you are unwell with flu-like symptoms, do not go outside your property or home, do not go to work, school or shops unless it is essential.
- Ensure you have enough supply of any medications being taken by you or your family.
- Stop shaking hands or kissing as a greeting.
- Avoid crowds if possible. If not, keep the time short.
- To minimise contact, and where possible, use debit and credit cards instead of cash and make use of online and self-serve transactions
- Consider whether future travel plans are sensible and necessary.

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If you look after or provide care for a sick family member with flu-like symptoms, remember to:

- Care for the sick person in a single room with dedicated ensuite if possible
- Keep the door closed and windows open where possible.
- Keep the number of carers to a minimum.
- Always use a hand sanitiser before and after entering the room, or wash hands with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly.
- Dispose of tissues and masks in a sealed plastic bag and put in the usual household waste.
- If your family member becomes very unwell, get medical help by calling the Foster Medical Centre on 56833088 or the COVID19 hotline on 1800 675 398.
- For serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, dial 000 and ask for an ambulance.

Where possible, keep connected to your family, friends, work colleagues through phone, email and social media.

During business hours the Foster Medical Centre have initiated a number of changes to reduce cross infections. Please refer to their section of this article for instructions.

Whilst it is always best to be seen during the day at the local medical centre, if you plan on attending the South Gippsland Hospital Urgent Care Centre please call ahead on 56839777.

It is also best to call to the coronavirus hotline prior to coming up if you are seeking help relating to suspected COVID-19. If you come up, please attend to your hand hygiene and don a Mask (available at the entrances) before making your way to the triage nurse.

Please don't visit anyone at the South Gippsland Hospital if you have fever, cough, sore throat, and/or shortness of breath. At this point in time, you may attend the Community Health Centre (CHC) with respiratory symptoms (without fever), so long as there has been no recent overseas travel or contact with anyone with COVID-19. You will be requested to attend to your hand hygiene and don a mask on arrival.

If you are well enough to visit the hospital, please limit visitors to two per person, for no more than an hour, and whether it be the CHC or the hospital, please sign in and out to help us monitor who's in the building should we have any need to be in touch.

From Prom Country Aged Care

Prom Country Aged Care is continuing with the decision made earlier this week to restrict all movements in and out of the facility until 30 March 2020. At this stage, this is likely to be extended; we will review this mid next week and provide an update.

We must continue to be hypervigilant in our actions and protect those we care for against the spread of the COVID-19 virus; our priority is the safety of our residents and staff.

Prom Country Aged Care has no cases in the facility or amongst our staff or doctors.

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Thank-you for your understanding and help in making Prom Country House as safe as it can be during these unprecedented times.

Given the likelihood of this continuing for an extended period we are looking at alternative ways to implement visits with your loved ones and will keep you informed as these develop.

At this stage we are offering Zoom meetings and phone contact. For those who have difficulty using or cannot use a phone the Community Development Team will assist with contact using technology Monday to Friday during business hours.

Thank you for your cooperation. As a community we will draw on each other's strength to overcome the challenges of a world with COVID-19.

(Please note that this article was composed on Saturday 21 March)

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