

COVID-19 Update – March 2023

COVID-19 is once again on the rise in the community with an increase in cases reported in the last week across the state.

At Barwon Health we have recently experienced an outbreak at University Hospital Geelong as well as a number of staff unknowingly working whilst infectious that has impacted both patients and staff.

For your safety and the health and wellbeing of patients we now strongly recommend staff wear a N95 for all clinical interactions.

It is important that managers continue to report COVID-19 positive staff on One Point, so that we can support staff and track any outbreaks.

We encourage all staff to regularly test for COVID-19 and specific wards or departments may implement more rigorous surveillance testing if cases continue to rise.

The rise in cases is a timely reminder that COVID-19 is not over, and we all need to work together to minimise the risk of transmission in healthcare and aged care settings.

In response to the rise in cases:

• FOR STAFF

Masks

Whilst N95 masks are not mandatory for staff in clinical areas (except ED and Aged Care or during an outbreak), we strongly recommend that staff wear a N95 mask in these areas, to reduce their risk of exposure in case of undiagnosed COVID-19 cases. At a minimum, staff and visitors must wear a surgical mask.

Vaccination is still our best defence; make sure you are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations.

There is also good evidence that the newly available omicron bivalent COVID vaccines are more effective than previous versions at protecting against the more recent variants of the omicron virus.

All those who have not had a booster or COVID in the last six months are recommended to get a booster vaccine.

If you need a COVID-19 vaccination see your GP or pharmacy or make a booking at the Barwon Health Vaccination Centre. [Click here to make a staff priority booking](#) (open in Chrome).

Our vaccination teams will start offering staff booster clinics at Barwon Health sites in the coming weeks.

If you have symptoms, you must undertake a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT). If you require a RAT please see your manager or the Access & Resource team.

If you test POSITIVE to COVID-19:

- Advise your manager. You should not return to work at Barwon Health until day seven following your positive test and you are asymptomatic (unless you have an exemption from the Public Health Unit to return earlier).
- You should also continue to wear an N95 mask at work until day 14.
- Report your RAT to the Department of Health online [here](#), or by calling 1800 675 398.
- Tell people and places you have recently been in contact with, including your manager and household members, of your COVID-19 diagnosis.

If you are a CLOSE CONTACT of someone who has COVID-19:

- If you share a house or have had close contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive, you will be at risk of developing COVID-19 in the days that follow your last contact with that person.
- You should perform a RAT daily prior to attending work in the first seven days following your last contact with the person who has COVID-19.
- If you develop any symptoms, you should stay home and repeat the test (RAT).
- If you test positive for COVID-19 you should follow the recommendations above.

• FOR PATIENTS

CHANGES TO ADMISSION TESTING for patients WITHOUT symptoms of COVID-19

Patients admitted to a Barwon Health ward (University Hospital Geelong or McKellar Inpatient Rehabilitation Centre) including Short Stay Unit

- from ED
- directly from home; or
- from another hospital

who do not have symptoms of COVID-19 will be required to have a COVID-19 PCR test rather than a RAT for screening.

As this is a surveillance/screening test they do not require isolation whilst awaiting the result. We have made this change because PCR tests are better at detecting COVID-19 in asymptomatic patients. According to recent correspondence, this test should be sent to ACL (Australian Clinical Labs) unless advised by IPS.

Patients WITH SYMPTOMS, either ON ADMISSION OR DURING THEIR ADMISSION

These patients should continue to be tested according to the COVID-19 TESTING CRITERIA below and require isolation until a result is obtained:

Practitioners should test any patients who meet the clinical criteria below:

- Fever OR chills in the absence of an alternative diagnosis that explains the clinical

presentation* OR

- Acute respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, or loss or changes in sense of smell or taste)

Note: testing is also recommended for people with new onset of other clinical symptoms consistent with COVID-19** AND who are from the following cohorts: close contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19; those who have returned from overseas in the past 14 days; or those who are healthcare or aged care workers. Testing is recommended for those cohorts with onset of other clinical symptoms**.

**Clinical discretion applies including consideration of the potential for co-infection (e.g., concurrent infection with SARS-CoV-2 and influenza)*

***headache, myalgia, stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.*

Current Covid testing Available to BH

ACL

- Biofire(located at Geelong ACL lab, No CT value) – hr. TAT only 2 test can run concurrent (RESP/Covid). Refer to Respiratory Testing Criteria On Barwon Health Syndromic PCR
 - o Monday to Friday 0800 -1900
 - o Weekend/Public Holiday 0900-1600
- Qiagen urgent after hrs only(Resp/covid).refer to Respiratory Testing Criteria On Barwon Health Syndromic PCR
- Covid/Resp PCR – < 24 hr TAT 24/7(from arrival at ACL Geelong lab) .Please notify me via email of ANY extended TAT
- Couriers to Clayton -
<https://onepoint.barwonhealth.org.au/clinical/Documents/ACL%20courier%20times%20from%20geelong%20to%20Clayton.docx>

ARRL

- No COVID testing is to be sent to ARRL with the exception of Outbreak only tests following arrangement , approval and direction from Infection Prevention Service .
- Please return ALL ARRL COVID requests to ARRL , Infection Prevention Service will carry stock if required

Thank you to everyone across the health service for your continued efforts in caring for the community to contain the spread of COVID-19.

[Click here for UHG Biofire form](#) or [here for the Respiratory COVID inpatient referral form.](#)