COVID-19 and elective surgery or procedures – factsheet

What you need to know

OFFICIAL

This factsheet is for adults, children and young people (and their carers) who need to get tested for COVID-19 before elective surgery or a procedure. This includes all planned operative and invasive procedures performed under a general anaesthetic.

Emergency surgery may also require COVID-19 testing, but emergency surgery must not be delayed while awaiting a COVID-19 result. All emergency surgery will go ahead with clear COVIDSafe protections in place for staff and patients.

What is being done to keep me safe and reduce my risk of getting COVID-19 if I have an elective procedure?

All Victorian hospitals follow national standards which aim to prevent the spread of infections, and to keep patients and staff safe and provide good care.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, hospital staff are using personal protective equipment (like gloves, gowns, masks and face/eye shields). Your hospital is also following specific guidance for use of personal protective equipment for patients with COVID-19.

To keep you safe, you may be asked to have a COVID-19 test before you have elective surgery or a procedure, and you should let your doctor know whether you have had COVID-19 in the past.

How do I get tested for COVID-19 before my surgery or procedure?

You should only have elective surgery or a procedure if you are well enough.

If your health service recommends that you have a COVID-19 test, they will provide you with further advice on how and where to get tested. You can also check where to get tested <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/where-get-tested-covid-19> and discuss your choice of testing site with your health service.

You will need to tell the COVID-19 testing site that you have been asked by the health service to get a test before you have your procedure. You do not need to provide further evidence to the testing site.

It is important that you show the health service the SMS or other evidence of your COVID-19 test result.

Do I need to stay isolated before my elective surgery or procedure?

After testing, you should stay isolated until you go for your surgery or procedure. Stay at home and keep away from people you live with – wear a face mask when you can't. Do not have visitors. This will reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 after you get tested.

If you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 after being tested and before the day of the surgery or procedure, seek advice and get tested again, even if the last test result was negative. Symptoms to watch out for include:

- loss or change in sense of smell or taste
- fever
- chills or sweats
- cough
- sore throat
- shortness of breath
- runny nose
- headache
- muscle soreness
- stuffy nose
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhoea.

If you are particularly vulnerable, you may be asked to isolate for longer periods – up to 14 days before your surgery or procedure – to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 as much as possible. This is for your safety.

What questions should I ask my healthcare worker about my surgery or procedure?

It is important that you understand:

- whether it is important to have the surgery or procedure now
- the risks and benefits
- the expected outcomes
- any specific risks that apply to you
- the actions that will be taken to reduce your risk of COVID-19 or other infections, and other complications
- what might happen if you decide not to have the surgery or procedure now
- how urgent it is and the risks of your condition deteriorating if it is delayed
- if there are other treatment options.

What will happen if my healthcare worker and I choose to postpone my surgery or procedure?

If your surgery or procedure does not go ahead, ask your healthcare worker about what will happen next. Your healthcare team will work to ensure your surgery is rescheduled (booked in again) as soon as is safe for you. Rescheduling will depend on:

- your health condition, safety and needs (discuss any questions with your healthcare team)
- the likelihood of your condition getting worse whilst waiting
- the availability of your surgical team and health service
- government policies that are introduced for the benefit and protection of patients, healthcare workers and the community.

What if I think I have been exposed to COVID-19?

Ring your GP or the Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398 (24 hours, 7 days a week) for advice. Do not go to the hospital or GP clinic until you have phoned them first for advice.

If you think you have been to an exposure site, visit case alerts – public exposure sites <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/exposure-site>.

Check what to do if you are a close contact of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/what-to-do-if-you-have-been-exposed-to-covid-19>.