Transferring patients between hospitals and health services: COVID-19 testing

COVID-19 update 30 April 2020

IMPORTANT

This guidance forms part of the COVID-19 testing blitz the Victorian government has commenced and will run until 11 May 2020. As part of this blitz, asymptomatic testing of patients in hospitals can now be undertaken.

Who should read this?

All Victorian healthcare workers involved in transferring and receiving patients between public and private hospitals and health services. Specifically, this document applies to metropolitan, rural and regional, and small rural health services.

What is this document about?

It provides guidance on transferring and receiving patients who have presented or been admitted to hospital for reasons other than COVID-19, from another hospital or health service. This includes patients being transferred to rehabilitation services.

Will all patients be tested for COVID-19 prior to transfer?

It is recommended that - for the duration of the testing blitz (until 11 May, 2020) - all tests for COVID-19 will be conducted for planned patient transfers.

Where an emergency transfer is required, testing is not a requirement. The patient will be treated as per standard emergency transfer, admission and screening procedures.

When will testing be conducted?

Despite the change in testing requirements, health services should ensure patient transfers are not delayed. Where possible, testing should be conducted on the day of, or one day prior to, planned transfer. Where health services are unable to process testing samples within the 1-2 day suggested timeframes, testing should be conducted as close to the planned transfer as possible. Patients and families should be consulted prior to performing the test, with results shared with them.

Do patients need to wait for a test result before being transferred?

This is assessed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the patient, family, carer(s), facility staff and treating team. Asymptomatic patients do not necessarily need to remain in the transferring hospital while awaiting test results. The patient may be transferred if the receiving facility is able to ensure appropriate infection prevention and control mechanisms. It should be documented in the discharge summary that a COVID-19 test has been conducted and discussions held between the transferring team and receiving facility.

What if the patient receives a *negative COVID-19 test result*?

If a person without symptoms is tested and the result is negative, it does not mean that they have not been infected, as they might still be incubating the virus. In other words, a negative test in an asymptomatic person does not rule out the COVID-19 infection. Patients should still monitor for symptoms and seek assessment if they

develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19. For more information, refer to the [Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Case and contact management guidelines for health services and general practitioners](#).

What if the patient receives a *positive COVID-19 test result*?

If the patient receives a *positive test result*, the treating team, in consultation with the patient, family, carer(s) and facility staff, should make a decision to keep the patient in the current facility based on clinical need (for example, active management / requirement for respiratory support and infection control need) or if clinically safe to do so, transfer the patient to another hospital or health service.

The department should be notified about all discharges of COVID-19 positive cases from hospital.

As per the [Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Case and contact management guidelines for health services and general practitioners](#) 'Exclusion of COVID-19', repeat testing in clinically compatible cases should be performed if initial results are negative and there remains a high index of suspicion of infection.

What is the discharge process for patients transferring to another hospital or health service?

Patients will be assessed as clinically ready for transfer by the treating team in the transferring hospital. Where applicable, this assessment should include documenting the outcome(s) of the patient's COVID-19 test results. The assessment should be conducted as part of normal discharge protocols.

The outcome of the COVID-19 tests and discussions with facilities should be documented in the discharge summary and a copy to go with the patient at the time of transfer.

How should a patient be transported between hospitals or health services?

Routine infection control procedures should be undertaken as part of transferring the patient to another hospital or health service. This includes wiping down of aid equipment and vehicle prior to and after use in accordance with patient transport protocols.

Staff involved in transporting patients should wear [appropriate PPE](#) depending on clinical indication.

What is the process for receiving a patient from another hospital or health service?

Once the patient has arrived at the new hospital or health service, as part of admission procedures, the receiving team should:

1. check the discharge summary noting outcome of the assessment confirming that a COVID-19 test has been performed by the discharging hospital; and
2. conduct screening to confirm that the patient does not display symptoms for COVID-19 as per the [case definition and testing criteria](#).

The outcome of the admission assessment should be documented in the patient's file.

Do all patients need to be tested for COVID-19 prior to being admitted?

No. Unless otherwise specified in the discharge summary, patients do not need to be tested before being admitted following a transfer from another hospital or health service. Communication between the transferring team and receiving teams is critical during this process.

Testing for COVID-19 is only recommended for patients who were not tested before transfer.

Health services may need to follow up with transferring hospital for the patient's COVID-19 test results.

In the case of emergency transfers, patients should be admitted and screened per standard procedures.

Where can I find out more information?

For Victorian updates: coronavirus.vic.gov.au

For national updates: health.gov.au/news/latest-information-about-novel-coronavirus

For international updates: who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus

WHO resources: who.int/health-topics/coronavirus