



COVID-19 and elective surgery

What you need to know

30 October 2020

In the changing coronavirus (COVID-19) environment, content is often being updated. To ensure you are aware of the most recent changes, all content updates and the date the document was last updated will be highlighted in yellow and marked as updated.

Updates

Version/Date	Changes
30 October 2020	This update includes advice on why it is important that you and your healthcare worker know if you have had coronavirus (COVID-19) before; whether you need to be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) and if you need to isolate before your surgery or procedure.

What is being done to keep me safe and reduce my risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection if I go to hospital for elective surgery or a procedure?

Our hospitals follow national guidelines to help prevent the spread of infections, keep patients safe and provide good care. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, hospital staff may use personal protective equipment (PPE) - like gloves, gowns, masks and face/eye shields - to keep you safe.

Your hospital will also follow guidance for using PPE for patients with coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you have **or have recently recovered from coronavirus (COVID-19)**, having planned elective surgery may not be the best and safest option for you. Your health service will help you understand the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19), whether you should be tested **and if you should isolate before your surgery**.

Why is it important for my doctor to know if I have had coronavirus (COVID-19) in the past?

It is important to let your treating doctor know if you have had coronavirus (COVID-19) in the past. They want to make sure you are fully recovered from coronavirus (COVID-19) so your surgery is as safe as possible. You may be asked to have further assessment and tests.

Why is it important to know if I am currently at risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19)?

It is important to know if you are at risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19) to:

- make sure your surgery is as safe as possible
- reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) to healthcare workers and other patients.

How will I find out if I am at risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Before your surgery a healthcare worker will assess your risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19) by asking questions about your travel history, where you live, if you have had contact with someone who has tested positive and if you have any symptoms. Sometimes they might need to check you do not have another illness or infection.

On the day you are having surgery, a healthcare worker will ask you these questions again and check your temperature. This is important to check that your risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19) has not changed. If you have not been asked these questions before the day of surgery, please let staff know.

Do I need to be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) before my surgery or procedure?

A healthcare worker will let you know if a test is needed before your surgery, after they have asked you questions and assessed your risk of having coronavirus (COVID-19).

If a test is recommended, they will provide you with further instructions on how and where to do this.

Do I need to isolate before my surgery or procedure?

If you are tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) prior to surgery, you are required to isolate in the days after testing and before your surgery unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Circumstances that would exempt you from isolation should be discussed with your treating doctor or nurse.

How do I isolate before surgery?

The best approach to isolate before surgery can be discussed with your healthcare service.

What if I develop symptoms after getting tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) and before my surgery or procedure?

If you have been tested and you develop any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) after your test and before your day of surgery, you should seek advice and get tested again – even if your last test was negative. Symptoms to watch out for are fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss of smell or taste.

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

It is important that you know:

- why (or if) it is recommended you have the surgery or procedure at this time
- the risks and benefits of having the surgery or procedure
- the expected outcomes from the procedure
- the specific risks that apply to you
- how the health service will reduce your risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) and other infections, and other complications
- what may happen if you decide not to have the surgery or procedure now
- how urgent the procedure is and any risks of your condition getting worse if it is delayed
- if there are any other treatment options other than the surgery or procedure.

Are health services using physical distancing?

Physical distancing is not always possible because staff may need to be near you and touch you to provide care. However, all of us – healthcare workers, patients, carers and visitors – should always stay at least 1.5 metres apart from each other (physical distance) where possible. This is really important before and after surgery or other procedures.

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

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 it is safe for you. Rescheduling will depend on:

- your health condition, safety, and needs (you should discuss any questions with your surgical team)
- the likelihood of your condition getting worse while you wait
- the availability of your surgical team and health service
- changes in government policy for the benefit and protection of patients, healthcare workers and the community.

What should I do if I come into contact with a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Ring your GP or the coronavirus hotline (1800 675 398).

Do not go to the hospital or GP clinic until you have phoned them first for advice.

Where can I find out more information?

Victorian updates: coronavirus.gov.au

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

*This factsheet is based upon current research and will be continuously updated as new evidence becomes available. Adapted from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare, [FAQs for consumers on elective surgery](#)

To find out more information about coronavirus and how to stay safe visit
[DHHS.vic – coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus)

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>

If you need an interpreter, call TIS National on 131 450

For information in other languages, scan the QR code or visit
[DHHS.vic –Translated resources - coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19)

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>>



For any questions

Coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398 (24 hours)

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only

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Available at: [DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>