Information for aeromedical retrieval of patients with COVID-19

COVID-19 is caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

- SARS-CoV-2 is usually transmitted by people with symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness and shortness of breath.
- There is limited evidence that COVID-19 occasionally spreads from an infected person without symptoms.

SARS-CoV-2 is usually spread from person-to-person through:

- direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

Uncommonly, SARS-CoV-2 can spread via airborne particles, e.g. during performance of an aerosol-generating procedure, such as passage of an endotracheal tube or bronchoscopy. These procedures are required only for very sick patients with COVID-19 pneumonia.

People at risk of COVID-19 are:

- those who have travelled, in the past 14 days, within or through a country/region where there is local transmission of COVID-19.
- those who have had contact with a person with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

Precautions for aeromedical crew and staff accompanying a patient with COVID-19

- place a surgical mask on the patient (if tolerated)
- each crew member should be issued with a personal bottle of alcohol-based hand rub
- on ground:
  - as a minimum: wear a surgical mask, long-sleeved fluid-resistant disposable gown, disposable gloves and eye protection (goggles or face shield).
  - for patients who have severe respiratory symptoms requiring airway management or aerosol generating procedures: staff in close contact with the patient should wear a P2/N95 respirator, fit-checked, and other PPE as above.
  - Note that, if the patient is intubated, with closed circuit ventilation, the risk of aerosol transmission, is negligible and the P2/N95 respirator can be exchanged for a more comfortable surgical mask.
- In air:
  - retrieval staff who remain in close contact with the patient should continue to wear PPE as above (see note re use of P2/N95 respirator vs surgical mask above);
  - Rotary wing: The cockpit should be isolated through use of the aircraft blind. Once pilots are in the cockpit masks and other PPE can be removed.
  - Air conditioning (if applicable) should be selected in non-recirculating mode.
  - Fixed-wing pressurised aircraft: If available aircraft recirculation should be deselected.
  - If cabin air recirculation is selected, then HEPA filtration is preferred. Aircraft ventilation should remain on at all times during transport of respiratory patients, including during ground delays.

Tips for putting on, using and removing PPE

Put PPE on in the following order:

- Long sleeved fluid resistant, disposable gown
- Surgical mask or P2/N95 respirator (perform a fit check)
- Eye protection (goggles or a face shield)
- Gloves which should be pulled over the cuffs of the gown.

While using PPE:

- change gloves if they become torn or heavily contaminated; perform hand hygiene after removing damaged gloves
- change gown if it becomes soiled; perform hand hygiene after removing soiled gown

Take PPE off in the following order:

- Remove gloves and gown being careful to avoid contaminating clothing
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove the goggles/face shield
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove the surgical mask or P2/N95 respirator being careful not to touch the front of the mask/ respirator
- Perform hand hygiene

Hand hygiene may be performed using either soap and water of alcohol-based hand rub.

Aircraft and equipment cleaning

Procedures already in place for aircraft and equipment cleaning following transport of a patient with an infectious illness such as influenza are sufficient.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of your state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.