

**Monday 23 March 2020 0800 hours**

**Important information for all GP teams – Please share this with everyone in your team**

## Key Messages

- Use HealthPathways as your first call for local clinical information. Other sites are linked from there.
- Use phone and virtual consults as much as possible from Monday 23 March. Quick tips are available on the [CPRG website](#).
- Community Based Assessment Centres (CBACs) are expanding and should now be used for COVID-19 assessment as well as swabbing. Check criteria and request process on HealthPathways.
- Complete your practice preparation. See [HealthPathways > COVID-19 Practice Preparation](#) and ring your PHO if needed.
- There are very limited swabs nationally. Perform one swab only when swabbing for COVID-19. See HealthPathways for swab details and testing criteria.

## Introduction

As you will be aware, the escalation of COVID-19 cases and the public health response is evolving daily. To minimise confusion as things change rapidly, please make sure you read each update from the CPRG which will also be available and uploaded on Community HealthPathways. It is important we all pull together to get through the next challenging period in a way that allows us to provide the calmness and reassurance that our patients expect and will need from us.

It seems likely we are now at the point of community transmission, i.e., where it is not possible to trace a positive test easily back to an imported or known case. Evidence from overseas, particularly in countries which have thus far kept the lid on widespread infection, demonstrates the importance and effectiveness of enacting stringent controls to contact trace, to isolate, and to enact strong messages about the importance of personal distancing.

An important component of the strategy to minimise the spread within health facilities is to keep patients with transmissible COVID-19 infections out of waiting rooms, to reduce the risk of prolonged contact with particularly vulnerable patients.

We can try and minimise this health centre transmission by triaging people with potential COVID-19 and referring them to special community based assessment centres (CBACs) and by managing as many general practice consultations as possible virtually (telephone, messaging or video etc.).

## Phone triage of patients with potential COVID-19

Plans are likely to be in place mid week to allow telephone intercepts to practice phone lines with specific COVID-19 messaging. Patients with an agreed set of symptoms will be asked to push a button that redirects to a triaging call centre where an appointment can be made at the nearest CBAC if required. This will mean the patient will only have to make one call for an appointment and will not require any intervention by the general practice staff. This will also redirect patients with potential COVID-19 away from the general practice.

If the patient's call is not related to COVID-19, they will go through to the usual practice greeting.

## Remote consulting

Each PHO will be contacting its practices about options for enabling remote access to practice management systems from home. Apart from telephone consulting, there are a number of internet video consulting options about which you will hear further via your PHOs. The government has set aside funds to facilitate and support virtual consulting.

There are also plans to further streamline electronic prescribing to remove the need for a paper copy with a physical signature (and also cover the cost to practices). This will allow remote repeat prescribing without the need for the patient to come to the surgery. ACC and WINZ have also agreed to receive certain renewal forms following virtual consultations. Watch out for further details.

Time spent now getting staff established on remote access and trial phone consults or triaging is a valuable investment that will reduce the risk to our patients and provide support for staff in the practice. As part of the Government package last week, further funding for primary care including support for IT and virtual consults should be forthcoming.

## **Patients who present to general practice**

For patients who arrive at medical centres and for whom testing for COVID-19 is clinically appropriate, sufficient PPE, testing swabs and alcohol gel will be made available to practices. See [Community HealthPathways > Covid-19 Requests](#) under 'equipment and supplies' for how to order these. The current case definition for testing is also on [Community HealthPathways > Covid-19 Assessment](#). Note case definition will likely change as we enter community transmission. However, at present there is a finite capacity for testing so we need to continue to be selective about who we test.

## **Community-Based Assessment Centre (CBAC)**

A Community-Based Assessment Centre (CBAC) is now operating from portacoms adjacent to Canterbury Health Laboratories at the northern end of Hagley Avenue. Planning is underway for escalation to expand capacity in Canterbury both geographically and with longer opening hours. The decision to escalate will be directed by the public health response and demand, and staffing capacity. See HealthPathways for details.

If you have queries, feedback or need specific assistance in your COVID-19 practice response, contact [eoc@cprg.org.nz](mailto:eoc@cprg.org.nz) or send feedback via HealthPathways (do not include patient-identifiable details).

Kind regards,

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Canterbury Primary Response Group

[www.primaryhealthresponse.org.nz](http://www.primaryhealthresponse.org.nz)