



2021 Infection Prevention & Control for General Practice

April 2021 e – newsletter # 3 – Pondering three big issues on April 19th

The reason I put the date on this e newsletter is that things can change so quickly we can never be sure of tomorrow

1. Do we and our patients really need to wear masks in our clinic today?

“ For people at increased risk of severe COVID-19 themselves because of older age or chronic illness, physical distancing is most important. If you cannot maintain physical distance, wearing a mask is an important protective measure.” Govt website today

- You are a health care facility and are health workers (something we often have to remind each other and pts of)
- A side benefit is increased protection for vulnerable pts from other respiratory and gastro infections
- As of yesterday there are 171 active cases in Australia, all from quarantine with each the potential to leak This number and risk is increasing because most are the more infectious variants of concern (VOC) and remember numbers are increasing around the world. Quarantine is a human endeavour and leaks occur in all states).
- It only takes a presymptomatic or asymptomatic patient to attend for other reasons to put you and your colleagues and patients at risk. 30% of cases are deemed truly asymptomatic but pose a risk.
- Masks are a precaution – a concept patients find hard to grasp. It is quite natural for humans to assess ourselves as negative but in fact a precaution is just that. Imagine not wearing gloves when taking blood from a friend!
- A case detected today in the community has already begun to spread. Too late to start wearing masks then
- If you have had a case attend, you will have reset by closing down, quarantine, test and arrange a deep clean. But if you all wore masks you will be able to argue a case for your low risk due to mask wearing alone – worth it!

So what is your decision about risk and prevention to protect as many as possible?

2. Surely we are OK here with no community transmission and excellent contact tracing?

- The case numbers you see on covid.live.com today reflect results of swabs taken up to 48 hours ago – not what cases may be circulating today.
- The variants of concern (VOCs) which now dominate in quarantine in Australia transmit more quickly than last year (inc period about 2 days shorter). In Victoria’s most recent outbreak - by the time contact tracers reached the close contacts, they were already symptomatic and infectious. This year is very different to last year.
- You will hear the term ‘historic case.’ This is where weeks and months later, antibody tests reveal a case not picked up previously by the contact tracers for swabbing. Blood for antibodies is taken and reveals missed cases often asymptomatic and can be the link cases for outbreaks. Think northern beaches outbreak
- You will hear others say that we can tolerate a few cases here and there. The problem is that an outbreak can spread exponentially and once that happens control is lost. No cases is the aim.
- Essential frontline workers in healthcare, quarantine, aged care, food industry and others who must work close together are tested regularly to give an indication of what is around. Sewerage testing for surveillance is also performed. These tell us if the virus is or has been circulating but is not really a preventative or precaution

So how confident are you that we won’t have community transmission in Australia?

3. Surely we can wait until we get a vaccine with less side effects etc. Aren’t we all just guinea pigs?

- It does feel like a disconnect in Australia to race to vaccinate. However, VOCs in incoming passengers are our biggest risk with some vaccines not as effective against some of the newer VOCs. We have an extremely vulnerable population immunologically and a slow vaccination rollout makes us even more so
- Yes there are about 60 more vaccines in the pipeline but today it’s super urgent to stop this thing replicating
- We are in the middle of a global pandemic – we do not have the luxury to recruit millions for a bigger trial.

So you’ve been jabbed to start protecting not just yourself but everyone around you now?

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