

PATIENT INFORMATION REGARDING GP APPOINTMENTS IN CORONAVIRUS CASES

March 2020

If you haven't heard, Medicare has created some new item numbers for Telehealth. This means your GP can do video or phone consults if you meet certain criteria and you will get the full rebate – ie no out of pocket cost. You qualify if you are at high risk of COVID-19 and are in isolation or have been diagnosed but are not in hospital, or if you belong to a number of groups who may have higher risk eg > 70, >50 and ATSI, pregnant, parent of a child < 12 months, immunosuppressed, or have chronic health issues. Basically people who would be better off not to be in our waiting rooms.

Your GP also offer Telehealth consults for a private fee if you do not fit into one of these groups. Many doctors will be trying to do as much as possible on the phone and then will advise if you need to be seen in person or sent for tests. This may mean postponing non-urgent things like cervical screening (pap smears) or travel vaccines and routine skin checks.

Take advantage of this change. It is safer for you and your family, safer for your doctor and their staff and safer for the community.

Unless you NEED to be seen in person please try to organise a phone consult. Your GP will then arrange an examination or tests if they think you need it. Ask the staff if you are not sure.

If you have mild upper respiratory tract symptoms eg sore throat, runny nose, you will probably get better without prescription medicine. STAY HOME until you are well and use simple measures like fluids, rest, gargles, paracetamol and hot lemon and honey. Please avoid going to the doctor unless you are really struggling but please arrange a phone consult first. If you fit the testing criteria (recent travel AND fever/symptoms or a close contact) for COVID-19 get tested at a public clinic and self-isolate until you are cleared. If you are very sick and having breathing difficulties you should go to hospital.

Your doctor probably does not have much in the way of PPE (masks and other protective equipment). If we are sick we cannot come to work until we have fully recovered, and we really need all hands on deck right now. Please do not be offended if you are asked to wear a mask (be grateful there is one for you). These are not ordinary times and it won't be forever.

Sick notes can be provided for those who have had telephone consults as required, but please be aware that it is near impossible for us to provide clearance letter besides the day of assessment, which will need to be face-to-face. Scripts and certain referrals continued to be available via our website (www.myhmedical.com.au, top left of home page) for our regular patients. Also to minimise the time you need to spend in our waiting room please ensure you use the "Place-in-Queue" function of the HotDoc app on check-in.

Also please be aware that like many people, your doctor is likely to be taking a substantial financial hit by doing phone consults. Most GPs are small business owners or contractors with no sick leave. Taking two weeks off for every cold we catch is going to be very costly – personally and to the workforce. We want to be there to help you as much as we can, it's what we do.

So wash your hands well, stay at home as much as possible, avoid handshakes and high fives and hopefully this will be over soon and life can return to normal.

Flu shots (Government subsidised or private) will be available late April, please check closer to date.