



# Information for parents with infants and young children

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Victorian Maternal and Child Health Service update  
22 July 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.

## Maternal and Child Health care access is different

To help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the community, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services have been providing services to families through alternative modes of delivery, including telephone or online consultations and face to face consultations.

### Restrictions Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire

From 11.59pm on Wednesday 8 July 2020, if you live in Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, Stay at Home restrictions apply until at least 19 August 2020. These restrictions are being applied because of the increasing numbers of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the heightened risk of transmission.

If you live in Metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire you must stay at home. You can only leave home for one of the four reasons – shopping for food and supplies, care (including MCH services) and caregiving, exercise, and study and work, if you can't do it from home.

### MCH services in Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire are different under Stay at Home restrictions.

To reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), MCH service providers in Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire during Stay at Home restrictions will:

- Provide MCH services for all infants 0-8 weeks at each Key Age and Stage (KAS) visit, Aboriginal infants and children and those with additional needs or concerns including families on the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Program.
- Include alternative models of service delivery such as telephone and telehealth consultations supplemented by short face to face consultations to undertake physical and developmental assessment, weight checks and breastfeeding support.
- Undertake short face-to-face appointments for **all** 0-8-week KAS visits, Aboriginal infants and children and those with additional needs to supplement telephone or telehealth consultations.
- On the advice of the Chief Health Officer, from 8 July, all face to face group sessions held in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire will cease. Groups will be supported through telehealth and other virtual services where possible.
- Subject to staffing ability, KAS visits or consultations to children in older age groups from 4 months onwards, including alternative models of service delivery will also continue. Short face-to-face consultations will be scheduled for physical and developmental assessment and weight checks.
- **From 11.59 pm on 22 July people who live in Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire under Stage 3 restrictions and are leaving home for one of the four reasons must wear a face covering. Infants and children under the age of 12 are not required to wear a face covering. Due to the risk of choking it is not safe to use a mask on a child under two years of age.**

Please contact your local MCH service for information on change of service delivery and remember the 24-hour **Maternal and Child Health Line** is always available on **13 22 29**.

## **Restrictions Regional and Rural areas (except Mitchell Shire)**

Reduced restrictions continue to be in place across Victoria in regional and rural areas except Mitchell Shire where Stay at Home restrictions apply.

### **MCH service providers in regional and rural areas excluding Mitchell Shire will:**

- Resume offering face-to-face appointments for:
  - **All** infants 0-8 weeks
  - Aboriginal infants and children
  - Infants and children with additional needs including families on the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Program.
- Resume offering face-to-face appointments for infants and children over 8 weeks of age, prioritising the youngest infants and children first.
- Use alternative service delivery methods, such as telephone and telehealth consultations, to supplement and enhance face-to-face service provision.
- Resume offering face-to-face groups with a limit of 20 people (including all adults and infants and children who can crawl and/or walk in the count) and ensure physical distancing of 1.5 metres can be adhered to.
  - Density requirements of one person per four square metres will be complied with.
  - Where the four-square metre rule cannot be implemented due to room size, group sizes will be changed to meet requirements.
  - Group work will be supported through telehealth and other virtual services if people cannot attend due to restrictions of room sizes and/or staff availability.
- Parents from a metropolitan Melbourne LGA or Mitchell Shire that usually attend a regional or rural MCH service (because it's closer to their place of residence and is their regular service) **will not be able** to attend groups in the regional or rural LGAs during **Stage 3 Stay at Home** restrictions. However, they can be provided with telephone/telehealth consultations, supplemented by short face-to-face consultations for physical and developmental assessments, weight checks and breastfeeding support.

**From 11.59 pm on 22 July people who live in regional and rural areas (excluding Mitchell Shire) are recommended to wear a face covering when they leave home and are in situations where it is difficult to maintain physical distance of 1.5 metres from other people. Infants and children under the age of 12 are not required to wear a face covering. Due to the risk of choking it is not safe to use a mask on a child under two years of age.**

Please contact your local MCH service for information on change of service delivery and remember the 24-hour **Maternal and Child Health Line** is always available on **13 22 29**.

For further information about coronavirus (COVID-19), visit the Department of Health and Human Services website: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.

## **Face Masks and MCH Consultations**

Due to an increased risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) the Chief Health Officer has updated advice for all health care workers (including MCH nurses) in Victoria including those in regional and rural areas, about wearing surgical masks during face to face consultations.

- Health care workers **must** wear a disposable surgical mask in public-facing areas – particularly where adequate social distancing is not possible. This includes during MCH consultations.
- Clients (12 years of age and over) **should** also wear face masks in these same environments.

You will be asked to wear a face mask during your face-to-face MCH consultation whether that is at a MCH centre or in your own home if a MCH nurse is visiting.

**Children under two years should never wear a face mask due to choking and strangulation risks.**

## Feeding your baby

### Breastfeeding

Many parents may have questions as to whether they should continue to breastfeed, especially if they are unwell.

Breast milk contains many ingredients to help prevent and fight infection. It is recommended babies be fed only breast milk until they are six months old and continue breastfeeding with other foods into their second year of life.

The latest advice from the Australian Breastfeeding Association is to **keep breastfeeding, even if you are unwell:**

[www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/covid-19](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/covid-19)

If your baby is under six months and breastfeeding, offering them only breast milk protects them from a range of infections and reduces their need for medical treatment or hospitalisation.

If your baby is breastfeeding and using formula, consider replacing formula feeds with breastfeeds. Consult your MCH nurse, General Practitioner (GP) or Paediatrician for advice.

If you have stopped breastfeeding altogether, it is possible to start breastfeeding again if you want to. Contact the national Breastfeeding Helpline on **1800 686 268** for assistance.

If you have an older baby or toddler who is still breastfeeding, continued breastfeeding will help protect them from other illnesses until after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has passed.

### If you're using formula

It is easy to accidentally introduce germs into bottles while you're preparing infant formula.

Be extra careful about preparing bottles. This means always washing your hands thoroughly with soap, washing bottles thoroughly, sterilising them after every use, and making up formula with boiled water cooled to lukewarm or room temperature. See <https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/breastfeeding-bottle-feeding/bottle-feeding/formula-making-storing-transporting> for instructions on formula making.

Remember before feeding your baby, test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on the inside of your wrist, it should feel just warm.

### Access to formula

If you are formula feeding, buy enough infant formula for three weeks but check the expiry dates.

In Australia, commercial infant formula or baby formula is the only safe alternative to breastmilk for infants for the first 12 months. Every infant formula you can buy in Australia meets strict Australian Standards.

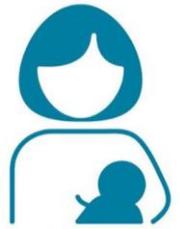
- If you are having difficulty accessing your regular brand of infant formula, ensure that you read the preparation instructions carefully as dosages can vary between brands.
- The following milks should **not** be the main milk source for babies under 12 months of age:

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### COVID-19 and breastfeeding.



If you need help with breastfeeding, or want to restart, call 1800 686 268.



Breastfeeding Helpline  
1800 mum 2 mum  
1800 686 268

Visit  
[breastfeeding.asn.au](http://breastfeeding.asn.au)

The National Breastfeeding Helpline is supported by funding from the Australian Government.

- Normal cow's milk
- Skim evaporated, powdered or sweetened condensed milk
- Dairy alternatives like soy, rice, almond or coconut milk.
- Homemade infant formula or diluted milks (of any of the above) are not a safe alternative to breastmilk or commercial infant formula for babies under 12 months.
- The use of 'follow-on formula' for infants aged 6–12 months is not considered necessary and no studies have shown advantages over using 'infant formula 0–6 months'.
- The use of formula for infants at risk of allergy or with cow's milk allergy needs to be on the advice of MCH Nurse, GP or Paediatrician.
- You can access formula through supermarkets, pharmacies, online stores or contacting formula companies directly.
- If you are unable to access formula, please contact your MCH service or the MCH Line on **13 22 29** for further advice.

## What to do if you or a family member gets coronavirus?

Mothers are more at risk of becoming sick from coronavirus (COVID-19) than their babies. If you're breastfeeding and you're infected, it is **recommended you continue breastfeeding**. That's because the virus **has not been found in breastmilk**.

Wearing a mask when you are with your baby (including during feeding), washing hands before and after contact with your baby, and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and any feeding equipment **will help** prevent your baby catching the virus from you.

If mothers are hospitalised or separated from your baby, you can express breastmilk for them.

Family members who need to self-isolate must stay at home and not attend public places, work, school, childcare or university.

More information about [quarantine and isolation](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/self-quarantine-coronavirus-covid-19) is available on the Department of Health and Human Services' website <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/self-quarantine-coronavirus-covid-19>>.

## What else can you do?

### Keeping grandparents and anyone with pre-existing medical conditions safe

Many people will suffer only mild symptoms, however the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart and lung disease are more at risk of experiencing severe symptoms. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can also be at greater risk as they experience higher rates of chronic disease.

If you or your partner get ill, someone else may need to help care for the baby or other children. Babies like to share their saliva with their caregivers, and they may be infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) but have no symptoms. So, they may easily spread the infection to the people looking after them.

Many parents call on grandparents to help with childcare. Unfortunately, people over 65 years of age are the most likely to get very sick with coronavirus (COVID-19).

**If your standby carers are over 65 years, or 50 years and over for Aboriginal carers, or have a pre-existing medical condition, now is the time to think about making alternate childcare arrangements.**

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) start again from 13 July 2020. Details can be found at the Australian Government Services Australia website <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/coronavirus-covid-19-and-how-we-may-help/if-you-already-get-payment-from-us/families#beforeapril2020>>

Talk with grandparents or other carers about how they can reduce their risk of infection if they need to look after the baby. You can find more information on [staying safe](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/staying-safe) on the Department of Health and Human Services website <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/staying-safe-covid-19>>.

## Baby necessities

Some supply chains may be disrupted if many people are unwell and you may not be able to shop if you need to self-quarantine at home.

It is recommended you have two to three weeks' worth of supplies at home to prepare for this possibility. Consider stocking up on nappies for this length of time or keeping washable (cloth) nappies on hand.

## Make sure vaccinations are up to date

Routine vaccination is the safest, most effective way to protect babies and children from illness.

Keep your child's vaccinations up to date to minimise the chance they'll need medical attention while the health system is dealing with coronavirus (COVID-19).

## Hygiene for you and your baby

The best thing you can do is to practise good hygiene yourself and your family.

Good hygiene includes:

- Covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue.
- Disposing of tissues properly.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet.
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitisers and putting them safely away from young children.
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.
- If you are sick, avoiding contact with others and staying more than 1.5 metres away from people.
- Cleaning and sanitising frequently used objects such as mobiles, keys and wallets.

**Because babies put their hands in their mouths, frequently washing their face and hands and cleaning surfaces and objects they might touch will help protect them from any infection.**

## Medical assistance

The Australian Government recently announced special provisions for parents of/and children under 16 years of age to be bulk billed when consulting a doctor or nurse via phone or videocall rather than in person. Please contact your GP for more information about these provisions.

## What other supports are available for parents and carers?

It is recommended that parents/carers contact their local MCH service for details of service provision in their local areas. Further support and advice for parents/carers can be received from the sources below.

- [Maternal Child Health Line 13 22 29](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/serviceprofiles/maternal-and-child-health-line-service) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/serviceprofiles/maternal-and-child-health-line-service>>

A free and confidential service available to parents and families with children from birth to commencing school age. The Maternal and Child Health Line is staffed by qualified Maternal and Child Health nurses. Parents can ring the MCH Line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get information, support and guidance on lots of issues like child health, nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal and family health and parenting. **The MCH Line continues to provide 24/7 service and is currently fully staffed.**

- [Raising Children Network](https://raisingchildren.net.au/) <<https://raisingchildren.net.au/>>

Provides parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts and [information for parents and carers on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide) <<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide>>

- [Nurse on Call](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/primary-care/nurse-on-call) **1300 606 024** <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/primary-care/nurse-on-call>>  
Get expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- [Parentline](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/services-for-parents/Pages/parentline.aspx) **13 22 89** <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/services-for-parents/Pages/parentline.aspx>>  
A free and confidential telephone counselling service available to Victorian parents and carers of children aged from birth to 18-years-old. Parentline is staffed by social workers and psychologists and is available from 8am to midnight, 7 days a week. The service offers information on lots of parenting issues and can help parents to develop strategies for positive parenting and personal coping.
- [1800 mum2mum](https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/breastfeeding-helpline) **1800 686 268** <<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/breastfeeding-helpline>>  
The Australian Breastfeeding Foundation's national breastfeeding helpline.
- [Care Ring](https://www.unitingkildonan.org.au/programs-and-services/financial-support/carering/) **13 61 69** <<https://www.unitingkildonan.org.au/programs-and-services/financial-support/carering/>>  
A Victorian service staffed by volunteers trained to respond to concerns and emergencies, including domestic violence, family matters, child abuse, depression and anxiety, loneliness, unemployment, grief, homelessness, money worries, drug and alcohol problems, and suicide.
- [Council of Single Mothers and their Children Support Line](https://www.csmc.org.au) **(03) 9654 0622** or outside Melbourne **1300 552 511** <<https://www.csmc.org.au>>  
A support service staffed by professional single mothers with lived experience who can provide advice and info on Government benefits, dealing with Centrelink, Family Court and Child Support Agency, parenting solo, housing, family violence, managing money, and work and study. Interpreting services available for women of non-English-speaking background.
- [Lifeline](https://www.lifeline.org.au/) **13 11 14** <<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>>
- A 24-hour confidential crisis support service responding to a range of concerns including anxiety, depression, abuse, suicidal thoughts and stress.
- [Women's Information & Referral Exchange \(WIRE\)](https://www.wire.org.au/find-support/) **1300 134 130** or live chat on their <<https://www.wire.org.au/find-support/>>  
A free and confidential telephone service provided for women by women offering information and referral on any issue including violence, sexual assault, relationships, the law, finance, health, family matters, drugs and alcohol, sexual harassment, employment and sexuality. Interpreting assistance is available for women of non-English-speaking background.
- [PANDA Helpline](https://www.panda.org.au/info-support/pandas-national-perinatal-anxiety-depression-helpline) **1300 726 306** <<https://www.panda.org.au/info-support/pandas-national-perinatal-anxiety-depression-helpline>>  
PANDA's National Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Helpline is Australia's only free, national helpline service for women, men and their families affected by perinatal anxiety and depression. The Helpline provides a safe and confidential space for any new or expecting parent struggling with the challenges of becoming a new parent.