

COVID-19 UPDATE #15



Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap & water



Keep at least **2 metres away from others**



STAY AT HOME



Always wear a **cloth mask** when in public



DEALING WITH CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is gathering momentum in South Africa, and the number of infections and fatalities continue to increase as we move towards the peak of the infection.

We have received queries from members and brokers as to whether private medical aid members will be guaranteed of a bed in a private hospital, should they need it as a result of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the short answer is no. Although Fedhealth can guarantee that we will approve funding according to Scheme Rules and available benefits for the treatment and hospitalisation of our members who test positive for COVID-19, the decision as to who will be allocated a bed resides solely with the hospitals, which are the **providers**. Medical schemes are merely **funders**, and therefore the actual hospital intake of members falls outside our mandate of service.

In addition, the South African Government reached an agreement with private hospitals to take in government patients who require critical care once government hospitals reach full capacity.

As such, there is simply no guarantee that there will be a bed for anyone, whether they are private patients or not. This is the nature of a global pandemic.

On a positive note

We do however want to reassure our members/ brokers that the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) guidelines and policies are quite clear w.r.t. the treatment that needs to be provided based on the clinical presentation of the member. **These are being followed very closely to ensure that beds are kept open only for those who really require them.**

Equipment shortages, Personal Protective Equipment issues and bed capacity logistics are a global phenomenon, and Fedhealth is in constant contact with facilities, providers and the Department of Health to monitor the situation here at home. Together, we are doing our best to ensure appropriate, timely, effective care and access to as many people as possible.

In certain provinces, license exceptions have been granted by the Department of Health to allow other facilities to perform procedures that are usually only licensed to be done in acute facilities; this is to ensure continuity of care where acute facilities reach capacity.

We are also confident that the national lockdown has contributed to a more manageable situation, and that there will be sufficient hospital beds in the country at the peak of the pandemic.

Please note:

- If you are **admitted for COVID-19 complications (which is a PMB) at a non-DSP hospital, you will not be penalised** as no co-payments apply to emergency PMB admissions.
- We highly **discourage any elective procedures** during this time to limit the unnecessary risk of exposure and avoid placing an additional burden on the healthcare system.
- We **encourage the use of day facilities** where possible.

These measures may all seem overwhelming, but remember that the current situation is likely to change in terms of provincial pressure and won't last forever!



USE OUR WHATSAPP SERVICE FOR YOUR COVID-19 QUERIES

We'd like to remind you of Fedhealth's new **WhatsApp functionality**. Not only can you use it for many self-service functions to manage your Fedhealth membership, but you can also obtain valuable COVID-19 information like symptoms, recovery, treatment, transmission, statistics, How To guides and FAQs, using this service.

To access the service, simply add the number **060 070 2479** as a contact and then type **'hi'** to get the conversation started, OR **click here** from your mobile device.



COVID-19 AND YOUR PREGNANCY

Pregnancy is meant to be a very special time in a woman's life, in which she must take especially good care of herself and her unborn baby.

It's therefore completely understandable that the COVID-19 pandemic might be causing our pregnant members stress and uncertainty. Here we address some of the biggest concerns pregnant women have expressed with regards to COVID-19:

Am I at greater risk to get COVID-19 if I'm pregnant?

Based on what we know about COVID-19, we believe **pregnant women appear to have the same risk of COVID-19 as adults who are not pregnant.**

However, much remains unknown. We do know that pregnant women have had a higher risk of severe illness when infected with viruses that are similar to COVID-19, as well as other viral respiratory infections, such as influenza.

We also know that pregnant women experience changes in their bodies that may increase their risk of some infections. Therefore, if you are pregnant, it's always important for you to try to protect yourself from illnesses whenever possible. Continue with standard precautionary measures such as avoiding crowded places, limiting the use of public transport where possible, washing your hands regularly with soap and water, and avoiding touching your face.

Risks to the pregnancy and the baby

Much is still unknown about the risks of COVID-19 to the pregnancy and the baby.

- Mother-to-child transmission of COVID-19 during pregnancy is unlikely. However, after birth, a newborn can be infected after being in close contact with an infected person, including the baby's mother or other caregivers.
- A small number of babies have tested positive for the virus shortly after birth, according to limited published reports. However, it is unknown whether these babies got the virus before, during, or after birth.
- A small number of other problems, such as preterm birth, have been reported in babies born to mothers who tested positive for COVID-19 late in their pregnancy. However, we do not know if these problems were related to the virus.

Prenatal and postpartum care during the COVID-19 pandemic

It is important to take care of yourself and your baby during pregnancy and after delivery. **Do not skip your prenatal care appointments or postpartum appointments.** If you are concerned about attending your appointment due to COVID-19, talk to your healthcare provider. When attending health facilities, moms should ensure they continue to take all the standard precautions such as hand washing or hand sanitising before and after entering the health facility, avoiding touching their face, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue.

Can COVID-19 be transmitted through breast milk?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through breast milk. The benefits of breastfeeding far outweigh the risks and new mothers are encouraged to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of their child's life and as long as they are able thereafter.

I've been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, but do not have symptoms, can I continue to breastfeed?

Yes, if you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 you can continue to breastfeed, but must take the standard precautions such as washing your hands with soap and water before and after holding your baby, covering your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and regularly cleaning and disinfecting surfaces with which the baby is in contact.

I am pregnant and have been in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. I have no symptoms, but I am worried something might happen to my baby. What should I do?

There's no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 increases this risk of miscarriage or preterm birth; however, to keep yourself healthy, continue to practice the standard precautions such as washing your hands frequently with soap and water, avoiding touching your face, limiting the use of public transport, and avoiding public gatherings. If you do develop symptoms, contact your healthcare practitioner or call the 24-hour COVID-19 Helpline on 0800 029 999.

I have tested positive for COVID-19 and am pregnant. Is my baby at risk too?

Because this virus was only recently discovered, we are still learning about the potential impact on the unborn child. In China, pregnant women who were in their second and third trimesters saw no increased risk of birth defects, stillbirth or miscarriage. Additional data are being collected, but for now, no data suggest that COVID-19 can be spread from the mother to the baby when pregnant. New data are available weekly so please discuss with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

Remember to look out for the normal danger signs in pregnancy such as bleeding, waters breaking before getting contractions, no movements from baby for four hours or more, severe lower abdominal pains, fits and fast or difficulty in breathing. If you experience any of these, consult with your healthcare provider immediately.

Like to find out more? Visit these sites for reliable information:

- <https://www.mediclinic.co.za/en/corporate/corona-virus/your-pregnancy-and-covid-19-questions-answered.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>
- <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/>

Sources:

- WHO Clinical management of severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) when COVID-19 disease is suspected-Interim guidance 13 March 2020
- Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists- Corona Virus (COVID-19) infection in pregnancy v. 18 March 2020



HOW TO COMBAT COVID-19 INFORMATION FATIGUE

Everywhere you look, people are wearing masks. Everywhere you go, sanitiser is being required by government. Everything you read has an air of COVID-19 to it. Every conversation you have is tinted with the same. Our day-to-day lives are an ever-present reminder of the pandemic we are living through, and each day new stories about it come to light.

While it's important to be properly informed and it's essential we all continue to do our part to curb the spread of the virus, it is very easy to find ourselves suffering from COVID-19 information fatigue.

What is COVID-19 information fatigue?

Fatigue is a physical symptom associated with the virus, but it's also something that is presenting itself in the lives of healthy individuals in and out of lockdown. Fatigue is tiredness and exhaustion, and in this instance, it is in response to the overload of COVID-19 information facing us. In addition to that, we have to make important decisions about our livelihood on a daily basis:

- We have to make decisions about normal daily activities:
 - Should we visit our parents to deliver food?
 - Do we really need to go to the shops?
- When we leave the house, we need to remember to take along our masks. If we don't, we cannot be out in public
- When we see someone we know we need to remember to touch them, shake their hands, or hug them
- We have to consider whether it's safe to send our kids to school.

The build-up of all these questions, information overload, and uncertainties, is causing physical fatigue in healthy individuals. Some symptoms that can come about as a result of this fatigue include:

- Being highly irritable
- Feeling stressed and anxious
- Eating more, less, or unhealthily
- Being unable to sleep
- Feeling demotivated or less productive
- Constantly feeling on edge and being unable to relax

How do we counteract COVID-19 fatigue with a positive outlook?

How to react to remind ourselves that what we are currently experiencing is unique, so it's okay if we don't know how to react to it. But if you identify with any of the above, perhaps you too are experiencing COVID-19 fatigue. Acknowledging that there's an issue is a huge part of overcoming it. You can also try the following to relieve some of the pressure you are feeling:

- **Limit the time you spend online.** Even if you are searching for COVID-19 related information, you are bound to come across it via social media or news reports
- **Give yourself some time to unwind.** If you are a parent, take turns with your partner to have time out from your daily responsibilities. Use this time to take a long bath, get outside, meditate, or spend some quiet time with yourself
- **Exercise.** Sometimes the best way to change your perspective is to sweat it out. Take a long walk or run, ride your bike, do an online workout, or simply put on some music and dance
- **Get out in nature.** Hiking trails have opened up all over the country and offer the perfect opportunity for a break away from your day-to-day stresses
- **Journal.** Writing down how you feel can be a good way to purge those emotions. Let what you feel pour yourself out on the paper and then try to find ways to turn the negative feelings into something positive. For example:
 - "I am experiencing information overload" can be turned into "I am grateful to have access to information"
 - "I am exhausted from hearing about COVID-19" can be turned into "I am fortunate to only hear about COVID-19 and not to have to experience it as an illness that I need to overcome"
 - "I am so tired" can be turned into "I am tired, I must rest, and tomorrow I will try again"

If you are in need of support, counselling or any advice relating to COVID-19, please consult our **Fedhealth Crisis Control Centre** on 0860 111 646.

Resources: <https://time.com/>; <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/>

IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS

Fedhealth Customer Contact Centre: Monday to Thursday 08h30 – 17h00; Friday 09h00 – 17h00. Call 0860 002 153 or email member@fedhealth.co.za **Emotional Wellbeing Programme:** 087 365 8664 and the new **Crisis Support Desk:** 0860 111 646 **Fedhealth Nurse Line and Emergency Medical Services:** 0860 333 432 **Paed-IQ:** 0860 444 128 and **SOS Call Me:** *130*3272*31# Press 1. Emergency Medical Services: 2. Nurse Line; 3. MediTaxi

Visit the **Coronavirus Hub** on the Fedhealth website: <https://fedhealth.co.za/media/2338/fedhealth-coronavirus-faqs-document.pdf> or use the **COVID-19 Chatbot** (go to LiveChat on fedhealth.co.za to select)

IMPORTANT COVID-19 RESOURCES

COVID-19 online resource and news portal: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD): <https://www.nicd.ac.za/>

