



On the front line of virus fight

Healthcare workers at Western Health and Northern Health are caring for the residents of the five municipalities with the highest rates of COVID-19 infections in Victoria. Like their colleagues across the state, doctors and nurses at Northern and Sunshine hospitals have been at the forefront of the fight against coronavirus since the start. These are their messages to the community.

Dr Megan Robb Northern Health Director of Emergency

How has COVID-19 changed your job?

There has been a lot of change in the way we work due to COVID-19. This has included undertaking additional training and implementing new models of care in the emergency department. We work in full PPE [personal protective equipment] which is hot and everything takes much longer to do. One of the biggest challenges is the PPE makes it harder to communicate and develop a personal connection with our patients. We all struggle with this aspect of our job at the moment. The pandemic has brought us closer as a team ... it has been a challenging time but we're very proud of our staff.

What's your message to the community?

Our staff on the front line are working extremely hard to care for our patients and help protect our community. We stay here for you, please stay home for us. It's crucial that everyone continues to maintain 1.5 metres distance and wears mandatory face coverings. Maintain strict hand hygiene – wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser. And please, be kind and support each other – we are in this together.

What's the one thing you would like the community to better understand about COVID-19?

COVID-19 doesn't discriminate. It can affect anyone so we all need to be vigilant. Healthcare workers don't consider themselves heroes. We are the last line of defence and need all to be involved in the fight against COVID-19.

Lena Pejcinovski Western Health Nurse unit manager, Respiratory Assessment Clinic, COVID-19 team

How has COVID 19 changed your job?

What once was a 9-5 job with regular staff is now working all hours and days and with

multiple amazing staff from all over the hospital. Many staff are working outside of their normal roles to ensure we deliver safe, effective and quality service during this challenging time. No lunches or catch-ups with colleagues due to café closures and social distancing. Hospital life will never be the same. Everyone is practising infection control measures to ensure we keep everyone safe – wearing masks and eye protection for up to 12 hours a day.

What's your message to the community?

If you have the slightest symptoms please get tested – and once tested, stay at home and self-isolate until you get your result!

What's the one thing you would like the community to better understand about COVID – 19?

Wear a mask. This virus can affect all ages. I'd like community members to understand that disposable gloves do not protect you from spreading this virus and do not mean hands are necessarily "clean". So many people wear gloves believing they are protecting themselves and others when really it just spreads the virus – particularly if you handle money/cash/mobile phones/items on supermarket shelves while wearing them and do not change your gloves in between. Use hand sanitiser before and after touching items and limit the amount of times you touch anything where possible.

Sally Guo Western Health Registered midwife

How has COVID-19 changed your job?

Before COVID-19, I had been allocated to the antenatal clinic. Because of restrictions on the number of people in a room at once, I'm working on the screening desk at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital. That involves checking the temperatures of people coming into the hospital and asking a series of



questions.

What's your message to the community?

Stay Home. If you stay at home, you're protecting yourself and the community.

What's the one thing you would like the community to better understand about COVID-19?

A lot of people think COVID-19 is like the flu. It's not. Also, many people with COVID-19 don't have symptoms, so they don't know they are spreading it.

Have you got a message for our healthcare workers? Send your messages of support and thanks to: westeditorial@starweekly.com.au





