

Support for children and young people impacted by COVID-19 diagnosis

Updated 18 October 2021



Western Health

COVID - 19

Be Safe -- Be Smart -- Be Kind

Ensuring children affected by a positive diagnosis or suspected positive case of COVID-19 have a safe and suitable discharge

Western Health (WH) has made a commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children. Every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of their family circumstances and background. Children have the right to give their views and opinions about decisions that affect them and to be listened to.

This document can be read in conjunction with the quick reference guide 'Unaccompanied child due to parent/guardian COVID-19 hospital presentation' located on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#), which provides further principles regarding Child Safeguarding when impacted by COVID-19:

Children who come to our hospitals should:

- Feel comfortable;
- Be cared for;
- Have a voice;
- Feel safe and be safeⁱ

Who is a child?

A person who is under the age of 17.ⁱⁱ

A child may present to WH in a number of ways;

- Via Emergency Department
- Direct admit to a ward
- Presentation to an outpatient department

Which COVID-19 diagnoses impact support pathways for children at WH?

- Child returns a positive COVID-19 result
- Parent/guardian/carer returns a positive COVID-19 result
- Child is identified as a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case and therefore is required to self-isolate

Is the child unsafe or in need of protection as a result of a COVID-19 diagnosis?

In scenarios whereby a child/children may present to a Western Health Emergency site due to their parent/guardian needing hospitalisation with suspected or diagnosed COVID-19, the child is classified as an unaccompanied child. This is when it is determined that there is no identified alternate caregiver to look after the child, due to the parent/guardians hospitalisation. Where the parent/guardian/carer can provide consent to care arrangements being explored, refer to the quick reference guide 'Unaccompanied child due to parent/guardian COVID-19 hospital presentation'.

Part 4.1 of the Children youth and families Act 2005 states (in part)ⁱⁱⁱ;

- (a) the child has been abandoned by his or her parents and after reasonable inquiries

- (i) the parents cannot be found; and
 - (ii) no other suitable person can be found who is willing and able to care for the child;
- (b) the child's parents are dead or incapacitated and there is no other suitable person willing and able to care for the child

Who assesses whether the child or young person (CYP) needs protection?

A Social Work referral should be made to assist with assessment of whether the CYP is at risk due to parent/guardian/carer absence or abandonment (see definition above). The social worker will co-ordinate conversations with the treating team.

Discharging the child or young person

- The CYP under the age of 17 may need intervention to support a safe discharge from hospital. In most cases the responsible parent/guardian/carer will be consulted to arrange suitable care in light of a COVID-19 diagnosis. WH staff must document the conversation with the parent/guardian/carer regarding care for their children, including the identification of the substitute carer if required. The parent/guardian/carer should contact the substitute carer to establish the carer is willing and able to provide care based on the parents'/guardian's/carer's wishes.
- If the CYP is able to contribute to the decision regarding their own care arrangements, i.e. are they over 15 and deemed mature enough to contribute to the decision, their right to participate in their care should be prioritised.

When COVID-19 supports are required

- When either a CYP or their carer is COVID-19 positive, their discharge should be guided by the 'Discharge of a COVID positive or suspected patient' and the 'Unaccompanied child due to parent/guardian COVID-19 hospital presentation' QRGs found on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#).
- Where the CYP is COVID-19 positive, their medical care will be managed by the treating team in consultation with and guided by the WH Infection Prevention Team.
- Advice from the Department of Health (DH) will also be required to determine if any of the potential carers are close contacts and therefore required to self-isolate.
- Once the CYP is medically suitable for discharge, isolation and quarantine advice will be provided by WH to the parent/guardian/carer and CYP where age appropriate. The DH may also liaise with parent/guardian/carer and CYP to provide further support and guidance.
- Social Work may be involved to support the emotional needs of the CYP and their parent/guardian/carer as required.

If there are factors that impact the families' ability to safely quarantine, the 24/7 Coronavirus Hotline should be consulted to request additional supports. These may include;

- Material aid such as food, crisis payments or support with resources to enable home schooling
- Emergency Accommodation in circumstances where safely quarantining or isolating at home is not possible. This may include;
 - Parent/guardian/carer being in a vulnerable health category and not safe to provide the care required due to COVID-19 diagnosis of the CYP

- Home environment is not suitable for the size of the family to safely physically distance
- Funding for in home carer support to allow the CYP to remain in the home

These requests must be made through the [24/7 Coronavirus Hotline 1800 675 398](tel:1800675398) (24 hours, 7 days a week).

Where guidance is required for WH staff regarding the process and steps to manage and support unaccompanied children who may be impacted by a parent/guardian presenting to a WH Emergency Department and/or for hospital admission due to suspected or diagnosed COVID-19, the 'Unaccompanied child due to parent/guardian COVID-19 hospital presentation' QRG available on the [Western Health Coronavirus Site](#) is referred to.

When the parent/guardian/carer cannot contribute to safe discharge plan (medically incapacitated or unsafe discharge environment)

If the parent/guardian/carer cannot communicate, or no suitable options are assessed to be available for safe discharge, then a report to DFFH Child Protection is required to assess a suitable discharge destination for the CYP.

- Child Protection intake (Business Hours): 1300 664 977
- Child Protection (After Hours): 13 12 78

For further guidance refer to the 'Child Safeguarding Procedure' available via the [Western Health intranet](#).

Support for Clinicians^{iv}

DH and DFFH acknowledges the diversity of issues that may present in vulnerable groups of our population. This is a challenge that is not being overlooked, be assured DH and DFFH are planning as best they can and will respond as quickly as they can as issues arise.

Online definitions, fact sheets and community resources are listed on the [DH Coronavirus website](#).

Support for parents and carers

Triple P Online^v

The Triple P Online program has resources specifically on parenting during coronavirus (COVID-19). This free online program includes information on:

- How to answer questions your children may have and the importance of sticking to normal routines
- The importance of looking after yourself so you can better care for your children

To access the program, [visit Triple P Online program](#) and select your child's age range to register. You'll get an email giving you free access to the program for 12 months. You can go through all of the modules or just the session that's relevant for you.

ⁱ [Child Safeguarding Procedure](#)

ⁱⁱ Children's Court Victoria <https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/publications/glossary>

ⁱⁱⁱ Children Youth and Families Act 2005 <https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/05-96aa120%20authorised.pdf>

^{iv} DHHS Clinical Guidance and resources <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/clinical-guidance-and-resources-covid-19>

^v Triple P Online parenting support <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/carers-and-children-care-coronavirus>