



South African Transplant Society

COVID-19 INFORMATION FOR TRANSPLANT RECIPIENTS AND THOSE AWAITING ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION

The South African Transplant Society (SATS) is aware that many South African transplant recipients are extremely anxious about the COVID-19 pandemic. We have compiled these brief, patient friendly guidelines, which we hope will help you to make decisions about what to do over the coming weeks and months.

It is important to note that our scientific understanding of COVID-19 is evolving, and as such these guidelines are based on the best available evidence at the time of writing. The content of the guidelines is subject to change, and we will make every effort to update the guidelines when relevant information becomes available.

Please note that these guidelines should not be seen as overriding information provided to you by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD). Our primary physician or local transplant centre should also be able to offer you advice.

The most important thing you can do is to prevent spread in order to keep you, your family and your community safe.

As a transplant patient, am I more susceptible to COVID-19?

We do not have specific information on whether COVID-19 infection will be more severe in transplant recipients compared to healthy people; however, other viruses often cause more severe disease in people whose immune system is low, such as transplant recipients. For this reason, it is important to take precautions to prevent infection.

<https://www.myast.org/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

What precautions should I take to prevent COVID-19 infection?

Wash your hands regularly with soap and water (preferred) or an alcohol-based (>60 - 70% concentration) hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the bin. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>



sats.org.za
admin@sats.org.za

As a recipient, should I start self-isolating with immediate effect?

Limiting your potential exposure is currently advocated through social distancing.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/16/social-distancing-guidelines/>

My child is a transplant recipient, and needs my assistance day-to-day. How do I protect my child?

As above: limiting your potential exposure through social distancing is advised. Hand washing before and after touching your child is important even within the context of caring for a specific individual at home. Soap and water is preferred and is easily available. If alcohol-based sanitisers are used, they should contain at least 60-70% alcohol in order to be effective. Twenty seconds is the minimum time to be spent on each hand hygiene episode.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/16/social-distancing-guidelines/>

Who needs to self quarantine / self isolate?

Self-quarantine for COVID-19 is recommended for individuals who have been directly exposed to the virus or who have travelled to areas where there are large numbers of people infected in order to prevent further transmission.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/15/covid-19-self-quarantine-guidelines/>

Should I restrict any travel plans?

Yes, travel bans are being implemented globally, including in South Africa. We advise that until further notice, you avoid all non-essential travel, both international and domestic. If you have to travel, please take all necessary precautions.

Someone I know or family member has been exposed to a COVID-19 case or returned from a place with large numbers of confirmed cases, what should I do?

Avoid contact with that person. If they are asymptomatic for a period of 2 weeks it should be safe to interact with them.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/14/coming-into-contact-with-someone-diagnosed-with-covid-19/>

What should these exposed persons be doing?

They should self-quarantine for a period of 2 weeks.

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/16/covid-19-10-step-guide-to-self-quarantine/>

"...to advance the science of transplantation and to facilitate contact between those interested in transplantation and related subjects."



sats.org.za
admin@sats.org.za

Should I wear a mask in public places?

That is a matter of personal choice. However, resources are rare in a pandemic and should be concentrated at hospitals and other facilities. The benefit of wearing masks in public is controversial even for transplant recipients. It is unknown if wearing a mask will help prevent infection. It may lead to less or more touching of your face. Overall, if you choose to use a mask to prevent any spread of infection, it is recommended to choose a surgical mask (do not use an N95 mask), and use it combined with good hand hygiene. People who are coughing and sneezing who wear a mask are less likely to infect others.

<https://www.myast.org/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

If I start having symptoms, what should I do?

Do not panic. Do not rush to the doctor or laboratory. First, phone General Public Helpline 0800 029 999 and follow their advice. You can contact your transplant centre / physician for additional advice.

Stay home, except to get medical care as directed by the helpline. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transport or taxis.

Rest, ensure you drink plenty of fluids and use medications (like paracetamol) as needed to reduce fever and/or pain. There is no specific treatment for Covid-19 and care is supportive. For over 80% of patients symptoms are mild and self-limiting.

Avoid close contact with those who are sick. When in contact with others, wear a mask if available. Avoid sharing dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding – after using these, wash them well. Use the prevention measures listed in this advice sheet. Only discontinue home isolation in consultation with helpline/healthcare providers (usually 14 days).

If you are feeling short of breath or have difficulty breathing, seek health care urgently. Call ahead to your doctor or health facility to alert them. As soon as you arrive: tell them about your symptoms and any recent travel/contacts. Expect to put on a mask before you enter the facility.

<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/department-of-health/files/atoms/files/General%20Advice%20Leaflet%20English.pdf>

Where can I get tested?

You should call the NICD helpline on 0800 029 999. They will advise you where the closest public or private facility is for you to go for a test and how to access the facility.. Testing kits are limited and warranted for persons under investigation as per the NICD case definition. Unnecessary testing can result in false positives burdening the healthcare system.

<http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/>

"...to advance the science of transplantation and to facilitate contact between those interested in transplantation and related subjects."



sats.org.za
admin@sats.org.za

If I am waiting for a transplant and I get called in, can I get COVID-19 from the donor?

Over the coming days and weeks, some transplant programmes may suspend services depending on the evolving nature of the pandemic. If you are called-in for transplantation, every precaution will be taken to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 from the donor and during your time in hospital.

For more information:

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>

<http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-communication-resources/>

<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/department-of-health/coronavirus>

Let's all work together to reduce the impact of this disease on our country.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Thomson', is positioned above the name of the signatory.

Dr David Thomson

SATS President

On behalf of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

18 March 2020

"...to advance the science of transplantation and to facilitate contact between those interested in transplantation and related subjects."