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## 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 and wait-listed patients have concerns around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have updated these patient friendly guidelines, which we hope will help you to make informed decisions about what to do over the coming weeks and months.

It is important to note that our scientific understanding of COVID-19 is still evolving, and as such these guidelines are based on the best available evidence at the time of writing. The content of the guidelines are 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). Your primary physician or local transplant centre can also offer you advice.

The most important thing you can do is to prevent your own infection and limit 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.

### **What is the best source of advice on Covid-19 in South Africa?**

The National Institute of Communicable Diseases maintains up to date guidelines online and runs a hotline on 0800 029 999 and on WhatsApp on 0600123456

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

### **As a transplant candidate or recipient where can I get good advice on the impact of Covid-19 on my health?**

The American Society of Transplantation has an excellent FAQ page for patients and the recommendations are in alignment with South African guidelines and practices.

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

### **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 frequently. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Avoid large crowds. Practice social distancing by staying at least six feet from other people and groups. 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. Wear a face covering when in public.

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

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

Limiting your potential exposure is currently advocated through social distancing and implementing all the precautions listed above..

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

### **I am awaiting a transplant. Could I get COVID-19 from my donor?**

The risk of acquiring COVID-19 from organ donation is unknown at this time but thought to be low.. All potential donors (deceased and living) are screened for COVID-19 symptoms, exposure history and are tested.

Transplant centers have in place careful steps to screen living donors, including checking for symptoms, limiting exposures and viral testing. Living donors may be asked to limit travel or higher-risk activities and to isolate themselves before donation and monitor for symptoms.

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

### **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. Avoiding large crowds and wearing a mask in public help limit spread.

<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 traveled to areas where there are large numbers of people infected in order to prevent further transmission.

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

### **Should I restrict any travel plans?**

Travel does come with increased risk. We advise that you minimize 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/>

### **Should I wear a mask in public places?**

Yes, you should wear a mask to prevent spread of infection, it is recommended to choose a cloth or simple surgical mask and use it combined with good hand hygiene..

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/09/25/the-need-for-masks-the-battle-against-covid-19-is-far-from-won/>

### **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.

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

### **Where can I get tested?**

If you think you might have contracted the virus, you can call the NICD helpline (0800 029 999) and you will be advised on possible testing facilities. However, testing is not routinely done unless testing is indicated by a health professional therefore one would need to be assessed by your medical practitioner in order to qualify for testing.

<https://www.gov.za/coronavirus/faq#:~:text=If%20you%20think%20you%20might,to%20qualify%20for%20testing>

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

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. Please pay attention to local safety precautions in the hospital as minimizing the risk is dependent on these steps being followed by everyone.

### **For more information:**

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

<https://www.gov.za/coronavirus/>

<https://coronavirus.westerncape.gov.za/>

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

**Dr David Thomson**

**SATS President**

On behalf of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

22 October 2020

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