

# **AIYA MEDICAL CENTRE**

## **PANDEMIC POLICY**

## 4.28 Response to Pandemic Outbreaks

### 4.28.1 Policy

A pandemic is an epidemic that occurs globally or over a widespread area, crossing international boundaries. A pandemic or public health emergency poses an imminent threat to human health as the present disease is contagious, meaning that it can be transmitted directly or indirectly by an infectious or toxic agent between sources. For a communicable disease to be considered as a pandemic, there must be little or no pre-existing immunity in humans; it must lead to illness, and it must have the capability to spread easily from source to source.

Pandemics are often, but not always, caused by influenza viruses. For the intent of the guidelines in the below procedures, the public health emergency shall be taken as contagious and posing a significant risk to human health, such as influenza or other novel viruses. These unexpected events require a quick, educated and efficient response from the practice team to minimise and eliminate risk where possible (also refer to **Section 8.2 – Risk assessment and management**)

During a pandemic, there is an increased demand for healthcare services and they are often working beyond capacity. It is critical that our practice can continue to operate during this time, where appropriate.

Our practice has appointed a member of the practice team with primary responsibility for managing and executing our pandemic response plan and sufficient training has been provided.

Aiya Medical centre's response to the emergency will prioritise to the greatest extent possible, the health and safety of the organisation's practice team and the general public.

### 4.28.2 Procedure

Our practice has appointed the Principal GP, Dr Ranjini Krishna with primary responsibility for managing and executing our pandemic response plan and sufficient training has been provided.

Our practice's Emergency Response Business Continuity Plan is located next to our policy and procedure manual at the Reception Area and details what measures the practice team should take to reduce risk and maintain the safety and wellbeing of team members and the public. It also details the best course of action for continuing practice's operations, when appropriate, and the guidelines for the closure of the practice, if necessary. All practice team members are trained annually in our practice's pandemic response procedures.

In the event of a pandemic, our practice may experience illness of practice team members or immediate family, or the requirement of practice team members to isolate or self-quarantine. Personal issues may arise for team members, such as the need to care for children in the absence of childcare, or caring for ill family members. Other extenuating circumstances may arise, these can

include but are not limited to practice team members suffering from mental anguish or autoimmune diseases, affecting their ability to be present in the practice.

All of the above may result in unplanned absences of clinical team members and as often there is an increased demand for healthcare during a pandemic, this may have an effect on the practices' ability to provide quality patient care.

In order to combat the effects of a pandemic, whilst ensuring team and patient safety, we try to prevent and minimise the spread, prepare for the impact and respond to the effects.

### **Preventing the spread**

Preventing the surfacing of a novel virus is almost impossible; however, it is possible to limit the spread of the disease by taking rigorous precautionary measures. The control measures taken at Aiya Medical Centre to limit the spread of viruses and diseases in the event of a pandemic are as follows:

- All practice staff members and patients/visitors, where appropriate, are provided with adequate personal protective equipment. This includes gowns, gloves, goggles and face masks/N95 respirators. All personal protective equipment is disposable, where possible, as viruses can remain infectious on surfaces for periods of time.
- Hand hygiene is a key standard for limiting the spread of infection year-round, and adequate hand hygiene is practiced and encouraged at all times. Staff wash their hands with warm soapy water on a regular basis and employ the use of hand sanitiser where appropriate.
- It is important to have communication with those experiencing symptoms of the occurring virus.
- On arrival all patients must wear face mask especially if sick.
- Any Covid symptoms to call for telehealth consult and to take a RAT or PCR test (covid 19 pandemic 2020)
- All immunocompromised patients to book an appointment and stay in car or outside (not in waiting room) until doctor calls
- Maintain social distancing when needed
- Minimise number of Walkins
- Sign outside practice advising patients to test for Covid if they have any symptoms.
- Sign on our front entrance advising patients to wear mask when entering the clinic.
- We limit the number of patients in the practice at any one time to 10-12 patients. This ensures that patients can appropriately maintain social distancing. We encourage this by rearranging furniture, mapping out adequate spacing for patients waiting in queues, having strict appointment slots and encouraging patients to come to appointments alone, where possible
- We have installed clear Perspex screens at our reception area in order to create a protective barrier for reception staff who are in close proximity to multiple patients a day.
- We have an increased cleaning schedule, including the repeat cleaning of door handles, and hard surfaces. We also perform a thorough clean and disinfection of the practice teamwork area between shift rotations and hand sanitiser is readily available for all practice team members and patients entering the practice. (also refer to **Section 4.3 – Hand washing and hand hygiene**).

- There is no hand-shaking or unnecessary touching between team members and patients and the sharing of personal items is limited, where possible e.g. telephones, stationery.
- All children's toys are removed from the waiting area and patients are encouraged to stand instead of sit on chairs, where appropriate.
- There are temperature checks of patients and staff entering the building.

### **Unwell practice team members**

Due to the nature of healthcare, it is not uncommon for employees to become unwell at work. If this situation occurs, its management is imperative. Our procedures for this are as follows:

- If an employee presents unwell or is showing signs of the symptoms of the virus, they are isolated from others and provided with personal protective equipment, including a disposable surgical type mask.
- They are seen by a medical practitioner in the first instance, then arrangements made for their transportation either to a hospital or to their home - public transport will not be an option.
- A record and contact details are kept of all personnel who become ill and leave the workplace and the people they have had contact with.
- Once the suspected infected person has vacated the premises, their work area and communal areas are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Unwell personnel cannot return to work until they have received approval by a medical professional or a negative test result.

### **Preparing for the impact**

Planning and preparation in advance of a pandemic is likely to significantly reduce the number of people affected. Being prepared and having a plan to implement appropriate measures when a pandemic occurs not only improves the health outcomes of those affected, but can help to protect essential services including the practice and critical infrastructure.

These are the measures that we implement to reduce the effects of a pandemic:

- The minimum staffing levels required to operate the practice is 1 GP and 1 receptionist. We also analyse the composition of the workforce e.g. how many might be parents or have other caring responsibilities and have adequate procedures in place for unexpected absences including .
- At all times the practice is appropriately stocked with clinical and non-clinical supplies and ordering of extra essential supplies. Personal protective equipment is purchased when required and stock levels are maintained.
- Minor, non-urgent appointments are postponed in order to limit the number of people attending the practice.
- Telephone and video conferencing appointments are offered in the first instance where appropriate, as this significantly reduces the number of people attending the practice and minimises the risk of spreading infections/viruses (also refer to **Section 7.23 – Telehealth**).
- Communication is key in the midst of a pandemic, and we effectively keep in touch with our patients as well as other organisations, updating them with any relevant, critical information. We communicate with stakeholders by touching base with our patients via email

communications, and or telephone sending them updates about the practice, opening hours and services available.

- We have informative posters placed in the practice advising patients of relevant precautions and steps to take, including on our practice door we have displayed a poster which advises patients with any of the listed symptoms to remain outside the practice and call for further instructions. We also have posters to remind patients and staff in the practice to maintain social distancing requirements, and a sign to say face mask must be worn in practice .
- We hold daily practice team meetings, providing team members with regular updates and briefings on any procedural changes.
- All team members are extensively vetted in regards to working from home arrangements, and a thorough work health and safety assessment will be conducted before commencing such, ensuring the respective team members have an appropriate and safe workspace that allows them to perform their duties comfortably.
- We have a database in which all team members' home telephone numbers and email addresses are stored. This information is treated with high sensitivity and is only to be used in complete emergencies if the team member is uncontactable using usual work methods e.g. work email address, work telephone number. All team members are able to opt out of having these details stored on the pandemic plan contacts list.
- All employee vaccinations are up to date and appropriate seasonal vaccinations are offered to all staff in order to reduce the transmission of infectious diseases, limiting the risk of staff falling unwell.
- All practice team members have been appropriately trained in our pandemic response plan.

### **Respond to effects/recovery**

As the pandemic subsides, there is a planned recovery phase to assist in normalising services and getting work activities back on track. In order to fully recover from the pandemic, consideration is given to the restoration of social, economic, physical and emotional wellbeing. Actions required during this stage will be dependent on the impact that occurred on the usual operations of the practice. Any control measures implemented should be loosened in accordance with the threat of the virus and broader public health measures.

In order to recover from the pandemic strategically and effectively, a pandemic recovery team should be established. The pandemic recovery team will be responsible for the development and coordination of the practice's recovery plan.

In our practice, the membership of the pandemic recovery team consists of the GP Principal, and the practice manager all clinical staff and receptionists. Team responsibilities consist of:

- Keeping up to date with the evolving situation and determining the impact this may have on the practice, as well as the implementation and the safe removal of control measures.
- Reporting to senior staff members regularly on the effects on the practice and stages as well as the effectiveness of recovery.

- Ensuring that any affected practice staff condition is assessed regularly, determining when it is safe for them to return to work, and when working from home/leave arrangements should be continued.
- Tracking the status of practice staff who have become unwell and alerting those who they have been in contact with.
- Touching base with the clinical and administration teams regularly to monitor any loss of staff, the impact this has had on the team and arranging for stand in team members where possible.
- Determining the stages of the recovery plan, the continued duration of the plan, and when the plan is no longer required.
- Communication with patients

The pandemic recovery team will also take into consideration existing business continuity plans (also refer to **Section 3.17– Non-medical emergency response and business continuity**).

### **Pandemic Response Analysis**

From the impact of a pandemic, it is important to assess and analyse the response measures that were taken and determine what worked well and how things can be improved if the situation were to occur again.

Evaluations of the weaknesses that occurred when handling the situation are crucial for determining improvements and minimising risk in the future. It is also critical to capture any strengths from the practice response and effective control measures as they may be permanently implemented into daily operations of the practice.

When reviewing the practice recovery systems and their ability to combat the impacts of the pandemic, the following is considered:

- Key lessons learned,
- Key strengths of response to the pandemic,
- Key weaknesses of response to the pandemic,
- Changes needed to improve the practice pandemic response,
- Updates required for business continuity plan in response to implemented changes, and
- What we need to catch up on (back log)

### **Support for Practice Team Members**

Working in healthcare may produce anxiety among staff during a pandemic. We have control measures in place including promoting a supportive work environment, providing practice team members with up to date, relevant critical information in regards to developments on the virus and other protective measures that have been taken in the work place.

During the midst of a pandemic, practice team members may experience unfamiliar work and increased workloads. In an effort to reduce stress in these circumstances, our practice sets clear performance expectations and promotes a supportive team environment, setting daily goals. We

also closely monitor and supervise each practice team member with the employee assistance programs available, as required.

It is also common that some practice team members experience psychological strain due to fatigue and insomnia. At our practice, we support our practice team members by:

- Advising all team members that their health and wellbeing is our priority.
- Where possible, we allow practice team members to work from home in an effort to reduce the potential for their exposure to an infectious person.
- Giving up to date, accurate information to all team members on decisions or changes in processes, including the control measures being implemented.
- Offering counselling and support to all staff members that have been affected, physically, mentally or those who have experienced a loss due to the pandemic;
- Encouraging all team members to create a self-care plan and supporting them in this development (also refer to **Section 3.7 – Self-care**).
- When working from home, hosting daily catch-ups via video calls to keep visually connected.
- Providing advice from credible sources.