

How to support employees who are vulnerable to COVID-19 return to the workplace

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Acknowledgement of Country Keith Govias HBGW SSG Chair

Who is Vulnerable and Why? – Simonie Fox, AIA

Who is vulnerable and why?



Australian Government
Department of Health

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Advice for people at risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)

Some people are at greater risk of more serious illness with COVID-19. As we move towards living in a COVIDSafe Australia, people still need to take extra steps to protect those most at risk. Read our advice on who is at greater risk and how to protect them.

We're all in this together – but it is harder for some.

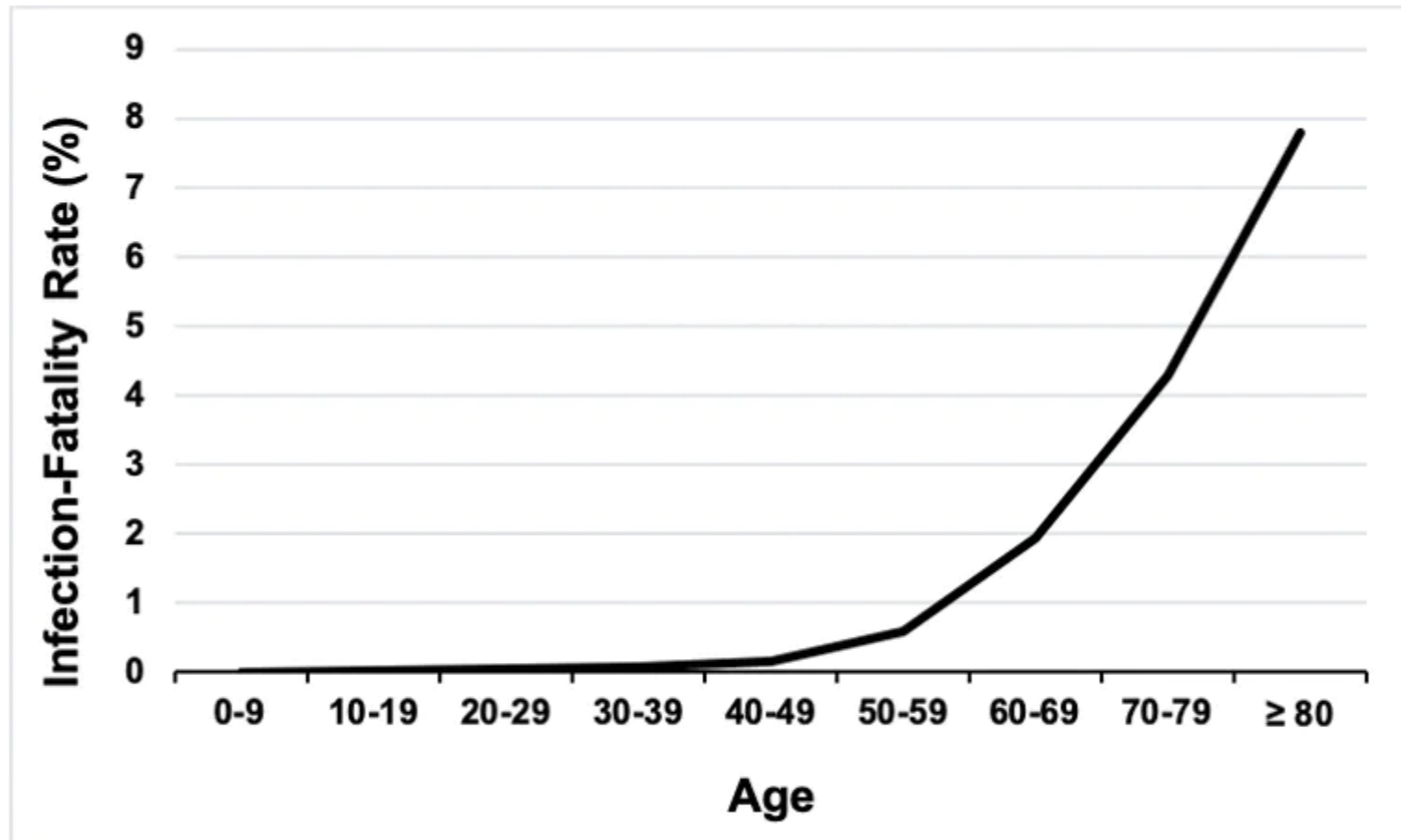


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and remote communities

- Our First Australians are at risk when over the age of 50.
- Remote communities are higher risk with poor access to health care



Older People



Graph of infection-fatality rates derived from: <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1473309920302437>. Jeremy Rossman from Verity et al. data.

Medical Perspective

**Prof Malcolm Sim –
Occupational &
Environmental Physician**

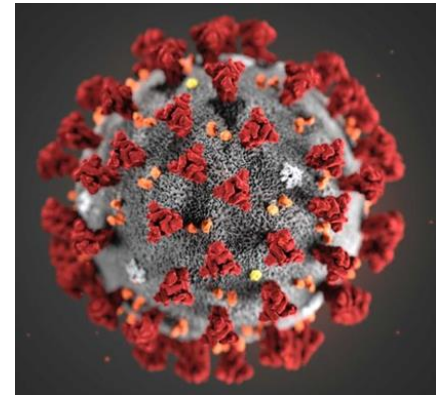
People with chronic health conditions

Chronic Conditions

- Chronic renal failure
- Coronary heart disease
- Congestive cardiac failure
- Chronic lung disease such as severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, COPD and chronic emphysema
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Poorly controlled hypertension

Immune System conditions

- Blood cancers
- Solid organ transplant recipients who are immunosuppressed
- STEM cell transplant in the last 48 months
- Graft vs Host Disease (GVHD)
- Primary or acquired immunodeficiency including HIV
- Undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy



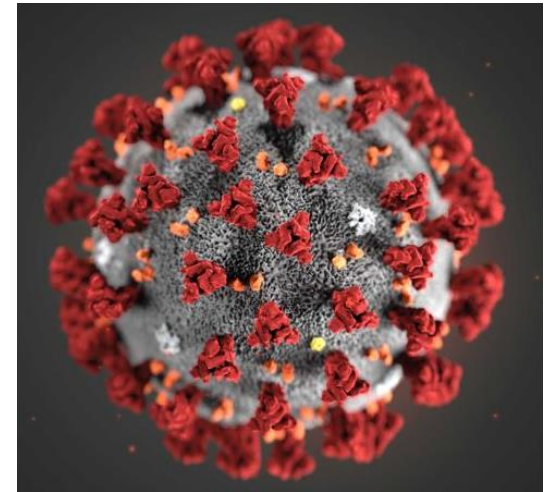
People with chronic health conditions cont'd

Medical treatments

- Anti-rheumatic drugs
- Immunosuppressive drugs

Other factors to consider:

- Co-morbidities (more than one chronic condition)
- Anyone aged over 70
- Indigenous and aged over 50 with a chronic condition
- Others aged over 65 with a chronic condition
- Ability to wear PPE, where needed
- Mental health conditions – concerns about being infected
- Obesity
- Pregnancy – not at greater risk of infection, but more difficult to treat and PPE difficulties
- Smoker?
- At risk family members



Therefore, thorough medical evaluation is needed

Return to work after COVID-19

Not just release from isolation!

- After COVID-19, release from isolation after at least 10 days since symptom onset and 3 days symptom free
- No requirement for a negative PCR test
- This applies to mild to moderate forms of the disease – usually no hospitalisation
- Severe forms require further evaluation and may require a negative test

Further assessment for RTW

- May have ongoing general symptoms, eg fatigue, or sequelae, eg vascular
- Assess requirements and demands of the job
- May have difficulties wearing a respirator or other PPE
- Mental health impact of the infection and concern about returning to a high risk job
- Possible stigmatisation



Psychological Response – Lucy Hartley, Swiss Re

Psychological response

Consider mental health implications

- Health anxiety response
- Fear of infection and consequent impact on health
- Avoidance of public situations
- Impact of social isolation
- Pressure on relationships
- Financial hardship
- Reduction in positive health behaviours
- Reluctance to seek mental health support



For those who require mental health support, consider signposting to: EAP services; GP; community resources (Black Dog and Beyond Blue)

Workplace considerations





Supporting a return to work

- Initiate a conversation between the line manager and the employee
- Don't assume that an employee is not feeling vulnerable
- Reassure the employee – experiencing anxiety and concern is a normal response
- Undertake a risk assessment with the employee to determine what support is required
- Consider consulting the employee's medical practitioners for practical advice
- Engage workplace rehabilitation services if required
- Antidiscrimination







Workplace considerations

Risk Assessment

Nature of condition 	Gain an understanding of the employee's circumstances
Type of work 	What is the nature of the role? What tasks are of concern? Can alterations / adjustments be made?
Working hours 	Is there flexibility to adjust working hours? Can hours be altered to avoid peak travel times or exposure to public?
Transport 	Is there scope to work from home? Does the employee usually use public transport? Consider transport alternatives eg. driving, carpooling, cycling, walking

Workplace considerations

Risk Assessment

Exposure to public 	Is the employee public facing? Can exposure be managed? Eg. video meetings; protective barrier; contactless payments
Workplace set-up 	Is social distancing possible in the office? Consider proximity to other employees. Avoid touching handles, elevator buttons etc
Workplace support 	Who can the employee reach out to for support? Clarify support team: line manager; buddy; family members; medical practitioners
Access to PPE 	What PPE does the employee require? What can be provided by the workplace? Eg. face mask, gloves, hand sanitiser

Questions?



**Should you wish to become a
signatory please do so via the
link below:**

[Health Benefits of Good Work](#)

