

SA Ambulance Service

COVID-19 PANDEMIC PLAN

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Contents

- 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY..... 4
 - 1.1 Introduction 4
 - 1.2 Implications for South Australia 4
 - 1.3 A Phased Approach..... 5
 - 1.4 Aim..... 5
 - 1.5 Objectives 5
 - 1.6 Engaging the community 5
 - 1.7 How SAAS is Responding 6
- 2 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PLAN..... 7
- 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES..... 7
 - 3.1 Staff management 7
 - 3.2 Industrial relations 8
 - 3.3 Financial management 8
 - 3.4 Infection control 8
 - 3.5 Social distancing 9
 - 3.6 Home quarantine and isolation 9
- 4 ANNEX 1: INFORMATION RELATING TO COVID-19 10

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The coronavirus COVID-19 is a new (novel) virus causing significant respiratory illness, with symptoms that range from mild cough, fever and sore throat to severe pneumonia. Some people may recover quickly, but others, especially those with existing co-morbidities could develop significant complications. There is evidence of rapid spread from person to person and while the mortality rate is between 3.5 - 4% in some countries, it is currently estimated at 1% in Australia¹.

Travel restrictions and rapid public health responses throughout the country have attempted to contain the spread of the virus in Australia. However, its rapid spread in other countries indicates that South Australia needs to be prepared for community transmission.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) formally declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a 'Pandemic'² on 11 March, 2020.

The growing threat in Australia requires increased planning to deliver ambulance services and to focus all efforts on patient and staff safety.

1.2 Implications for South Australia

South Australia is prepared to deal with COVID-19 and health services, hospitals, primary care providers and emergency services have existing pandemic arrangements in place.

While the health system is well prepared for the COVID-19 public health emergency, all systems will be challenged in this pandemic, making it important to plan for multiple possible scenarios.

This plan supports SA Ambulance Service (SAAS) to be better prepared to respond appropriately and will be regularly updated as more information about the virus transmission, required control measures, testing and treatment become available.

The SA Department of Health and Wellbeing is the control agency for this Level 2³ Public Health emergency taking action under the Public Health Act 2011, and *Commonwealth Biosecurity Act 2013* to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all South Australians. A *Major Emergency Declaration* has also been made under the Emergency Management Act, 2004, designating the Police Commissioner as the State Coordinator.

¹ Australian Deputy Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly (20 March 2020)

² A disease spreading in multiple countries around the world at the same time (WHO 11 March 2020)

³ SA Health Major Incident Plan, 2018

1.3 A Phased Approach

SAAS response to COVID-19 has a phased approach. Each phase of the action plan has initiatives and activities to be implemented as appropriate at the time, according to the virus spread and its impact. The table below outlines six (6) phases which will be expanded on further in the plan.

Response Phases:	
Phase 0	Intelligence gathering + normal business activities
Phase 1	Review and improve pandemic activities
Phase 2	Virus containment phase
Phase 3	Increased ambulance response actions and activities
Phase 4	Peak action occurring
Recovery	Stand down and recovery

1.4 Aim

This plan contributes to reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of ambulance services in South Australia, and supports the ongoing safety and wellbeing of SAAS staff and our patients.

1.5 Objectives

SAAS will work with SA Health and other agencies as required to:

- Support containment strategies through accurate, timely and coordinated communication.
- Prevent transmission by screening calls for ambulance assistance and implementing infection control measures to mitigate and minimise impacts on SAAS staff and the community.
- Ensure SAAS business continuity plans (BCP) identify and can deliver critical ambulance services under increasing demand and staff absence.
- Provide staff safety and welfare support throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Inform the public and staff of changes to ambulance services in South Australia.
- Be flexible and proportionate enough to be scaled up or down as required.

These objectives are guided by the *Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)* including consideration of pandemic response plans from other jurisdictions.

1.6 Engaging the community

It is critical to communicate with our community to ensure they are aware of what is known about COVID-19, what is unknown, and what is being done by SAAS.

Community confidence in the ambulance response will be affected by the accuracy, consistency and currency of information they receive from all their health care professionals, and other public information.

Communication of critical actions to mitigate the impact and protect the community will be continually reinforced by SAAS. To do this, SAAS supports SA Health key messaging including social media, posters, translated material and other communications materials. These can be found at: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

A regular review of messaging and communications will ensure that:

- Messages are up-to-date, accurate and responsive to public awareness and attitudes.
- Messages are consistent across the health sector in South Australia (and the rest of Australia).
- Frequency and content of communication is appropriate for the audience and response phase.
- Key SAAS spokespeople deliver clear and actionable messages.
- Balance between providing general information while ensuring accuracy, privacy to individual patients and minimising public alarm.

Within SAAS, a dedicated media team is responding to media enquiries and coordinates outgoing information relating to COVID-19, including social media. This includes requirements of the State Coordinator and the Public Information Support Functional Support Group community messaging under the Emergency Management declaration.

1.7 How SAAS is Responding

This plan outlines critical actions SAAS will take in the identified phases regardless of the clinical severity of patients. These actions are expanded on in the attached Action Plans.

Phase 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal business activities • Gather information and intelligence – key person allocated to this • Monitor outbreaks in Australia and South Australia
Phase 1	<p>In addition to above</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and share accurate information • Engage with health and primary care sector to ensure appropriate clinical knowledge and requirements • Review all BCPs and implement BCP activities for this phase • Implement strategies to protect health and welfare of staff and patients (including social distancing) • Implement strategies to protect the organisation’s ability to maintain service delivery
Phase 2	<p>In addition to above</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other government agencies to coordinate plans • Review demand management strategies to ensure maximum resource availability • Implement risk reduction communication for staff and the community – focus on staff and patient safety • Implement required BCP activities for this phase

	In addition to above
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow other directions as required • Divert resources from less urgent care • Implement alternate models of care • Implement staff surge strategies (alternative crewing solutions) • Implement required BCP activities for this phase
Phase 4	In addition to above <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus service delivery on community emergencies (P1&2) and required hospital discharges (P8) • Extend staff surge strategies • Manage supplies and consumables • Implement required BCP activities for this phase
Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief and review (at various levels) • Lessons identified • Improvements implemented

2 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This plan is intended to guide and inform more detailed planning at directorate and individual business unit level.

All business units have reviewed how COVID-19 will impact their services, and used this to determine actions and activities required to continue their service delivery.

Detailed BCPs will support all business units to be fully prepared for potential the pandemic impact on the delivery of ambulance services to the community and the predictable effects on SAAS staff health and wellness.

All SAAS staff must be familiar with this plan, its contents and intent.

Public information is located on the SA Health website and other websites as outlined in Annex 1.

3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.1 Staff management

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health and safety of SAAS staff requires additional consideration to ensure appropriate workforce management, while providing effective continuation of ambulance services.

The Work Health and Safety Act 2012 sets out duties and obligations for ensuring worker health and safety which include as reasonably practicable:

- A safe work environment, safe systems of work, and safe use, handling and storage of any substances
- Adequate welfare and support for workers

- Provision of any information, training, instruction or supervision to protect workers from risks to their health and safety
- Staff health and workplace conditions monitoring to prevent illness or injury

Matters requiring consideration, but are not limited to:

- Staff redeployment from their normal duties or workplace to support the pandemic response with consideration given to:
 - level of skill/knowledge and abilities of the staff member
 - location of redeployment and accommodation facilities
 - orientation into a new workplace/role
- Implementation of staff screening procedures in all locations, including self-monitoring by staff.
- Infection control measures
- Supporting ill staff
- Management of volunteers
- Protocols for working from alternate locations (e.g. home)
- Vehicle and driver safety.
- Protocols for use of other workers to perform SAAS functions

3.2 Industrial relations

Under the Public Service Act a directive has been issued outlining staff arrangements specific to this pandemic, including leave applicable to public servants. This is defined in the Determination of the Commissioner Public Sector Employment Service: 3.1 Employment Conditions, Hours of work, Overtime and Leave: Supplementary Provisions for COVID-19.

Details in this directive are available on the following website.

<https://publicsector.sa.gov.au/covid-19-workforce-considerations-for-the-south-australian-public-sector/>

3.3 Financial management

Costs incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic will be met from within existing SAAS budgets until other financial provisions are made and implemented. SAAS will open a GOLD Cost Centre for COVID-19 costs to track all expenditure throughout this emergency.

3.4 Infection control

There are simple steps that everyone must take to minimise the spread of infection during this pandemic. These include frequently washing hands with soap and water and/or using hand sanitiser, staying away from people who are coughing and sneezing and avoiding touching one's face.

Information can be found on the SA Health website (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au). SA Health will provide updated information on preventative measures once more is known about the epidemiology and behaviour of the virus.

SAAS has provided additional information on PPE, cleaning surfaces, vehicles, stations and on the management of dirty linen, uniforms and clinical practice for the potential/confirmed COVID-19 patient. (See SAASnet)

3.5 Social distancing

Social distancing refers to reducing normal physical and social interaction in order to slow the spread of the pandemic. This is prescribed by government and while essential services (health) are identified as exempt SAAS staff should include the following where they can:

- Cancellation of large gatherings (weddings, funerals).
- Cancellation of sporting events and areas where many people gather.
- Border closures including specific international/interstate travel requirements.
- Special arrangements for Residential Care Facilities (RCF).
- Special shopping hours to ensure access for elderly and other vulnerable people.
- Encouraging people to keep an area of four square metres of personal space.
- Potential closures of schools and child care facilities – schools will move to online learning
- Children of essential workers will still have access to schools to enable parents to work.

SAAS will continue normal operations for as long as feasible in order to minimise the impact of social distancing measures. However travel requirements and future school and child care closures will impact our workforce if people/parents are unable to attend work even if they are not actually sick.

SAAS will review and implement working from home arrangements, leave provisions and other employment arrangements as part of their business continuity plans, to ensure we are prepared and able to implement social distancing in the workplace.

3.6 Home quarantine and isolation

In a pandemic, people confirmed to be at risk or infected with the virus will be required to stay at home or, if severely ill, isolated and treated in hospital. The nature and scale of these measures will be based on the severity of the pandemic. Health authorities will trace recent contacts of people infected with the virus, and advise them to stay at home for a specified period (currently 14 days). Quarantine or isolation measures could play a significant role in reducing the risk of transmission between infected and non-infected people.

This includes SAAS staff being prepared to stay at home if needed for a period in quarantine or isolation.

Welfare and wellbeing support services to SAAS staff and their families will be prioritised and provided. This will include staying in regular phone contact and could possibly include assisting with delivery of meals, food and other supplies in the future.

4 ANNEX 1: INFORMATION RELATING TO COVID-19

International

World Health Organisation (WHO)

Information and guidance from WHO regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that was first reported from Wuhan, China, on 31 December 2019.

www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Australian Government

Australian Government Department of Health

Coronavirus (COVID-19) information and resources

www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov

Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI)

The Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI) outlines Australia's strategy to manage an influenza pandemic and minimise its impact on the health of Australians and our health system.

www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ahmppt.htm

Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (the COVID19 Plan)

The COVID-19 Plan guides the Australian health sector response.

www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergencyresponse-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19

South Australian Public Sector

Commissioner of Public Sector Employment

Details of COVID-19 Public Sector Determination are available on the following website.

<https://publicsector.sa.gov.au/covid-19-workforce-considerations-for-the-south-australian-public-sector/>

Travellers

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Smarttraveller

Advice and alerts on travel safety including current travel advice relating to COVID-19.

www.smarttraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/coronavirus-covid-19

Other Facts

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – what you need to know

www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know

South Australian Government COVID-19 information website

Advice on COVID-19 for South Australia

<https://www.sa.gov.au/covid-19>