



# Office of the Chief Psychiatrist

## COVID-19 Interim Clozapine Management Guideline

04 November 2021

Please check this [link](#) for the latest version of this document.

**Currently there are no public outbreaks or public health directives that warrant the implementation of the Interim Clozapine Management Guideline. This may change once the SA borders are opened on the 23 November 2021. This updated guideline has been prepared to be used in response to local outbreaks and subsequent health directives as they pertain to individual LGAs and subsequently LHNs.**

The purpose of this interim guideline is to ensure that the risk of infection for this group of people is reduced by limiting clinic visits when required to do so, for screening in line with the current SA Health COVID-19 guidelines.

This guideline is an interim measure used to reduce the risk to vulnerable people, experiencing mental illness during local community transmission outbreaks, through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring that they receive appropriate clozapine care and is not to be taken as a permanent change in management guidelines. This information is supplementary to the SA Health [Clozapine Management Clinical Guideline](#).

This interim guideline applies to the clozapine clinics currently held within SA Health clozapine centres and has been extended to people prescribed clozapine in GP shared care.

The guideline is only to be implemented at times of public outbreaks of COVID-19 community transmission in line with any SA Health public health directives.

This interim guideline was reviewed by members of the Clozapine Strategic Management Group and the Chief Psychiatrist on 28.10.2021. In reviewing the interim guideline, the updates and recommendations have been made in line with the State directions and current SA Health requirements, taking into consideration the planned opening of SA borders on 23.11.2021.

Each Local Health Network (LHN) in implementing the interim guideline, at times of community transmission of COVID-19 infections, is also to consider the individual LHN directions.

It is expected that all SA Health clozapine clinics, including people in GP shared care and those in supported residential and residential aged care facilities are currently receiving usual clozapine clinic practice of face to face reviews as outlined in the [Clozapine Management Clinical Guideline](#).

### Standard Screening Questions

For all contacts the standard questions regarding COVID-19 risks are to be asked and assessed. Refer to the CBIS Novel Respiratory Pathogen Screening Tool under service plans.

# COVID-19 Community Transmission Protocol to be enacted during community outbreaks

In the event of a local COVID-19 outbreak resulting in community transmission and subsequent SA Health directives the following interim protocol may be implemented.

## Weekly Clozapine Monitoring during local Community Transmission

There are no changes to the face to face appointment requirements for people who require weekly clozapine monitoring.

All participants must be seen by a medical officer to have a review for signs and symptoms of infection and mental state review as per the SA Health [Clozapine Management Clinical Guideline](#). (CMCG)

## Four Weekly Clozapine Monitoring during local Community Transmission

People on four weekly monitoring are to continue to have a four weekly blood test as per the CMCG.

Extended dispensation for dispensing without a blood test is not recommended due to the increased risk of raised clozapine levels due to an infection. It is considered that regular blood monitoring is a safer option for people prescribed clozapine.

For stable participants face to face assessment for signs and symptoms of infection and mental state review, can be increased to eight weekly face to face assessment, i.e. Face to face assessment every second month.

As the SA Health restrictions are modified over the course of an outbreak, a return to four weekly face to face assessments should be done with the individual needs of the person being taken into consideration and within the local LHN directives.

The four weekly assessments in between the eight weekly face to face assessments can be conducted via teleconference or video conferencing arrangements. See [OCP COVID-19 MH fact sheet July 20 2021](#)

- Where possible a thermometer is to be given to participants to be able to take their temperature at home.
- These assessments must be fully documented and follow the [Nurse-led Clozapine Clinic – Questions to ask at Clozapine reviews](#) .
- Any abnormality or adverse event detected will be managed in the usual manner according to the CMCG and the [Nurse Led Clozapine Clinics – Pathways and protocols for managing abnormal/adverse events](#) and the [Psychotropic Induced Constipation Guideline](#).
- GP assessments can be conducted by tele or video conferencing.

## Pharmacy prescription management

During this time of increased risk, prescription management will need to be streamlined. The aim is to reduce the amount of time a person is waiting in a pharmacy.

Prescriptions are to be faxed to the dispensing pharmacy, not to be given to participants. The original prescription must be provided to the dispensing pharmacy within seven days.

Pharmacists will need to be contacted and advised that:

- SA Health is requesting that prescriptions for clozapine are dispensed as soon as the prescription is received where possible, to minimise the waiting time for participants in the pharmacy.
- The original prescription will be provided within 7 days
- Pharmacists are requested to contact the Mental Health Services within 48 hours if the person has not collected their prescription. This is to reduce the risk of therapy interruption.

Participants are to be advised to provide their pharmacy with enough time to dispense the prescription before attending to collect their clozapine.

For people in mandatory isolation pharmacy delivery if available, is to be arranged. If this is not possible the MHS are to arrange medication delivery, contacting the person via telephone advising of the time of delivery. Medication is to be left at the person's door and further contact to be made to ensure the person has collected their medication.

### **Supported Residential and Residential Aged Care Facility Management**

For people in Supported Residential Facilities (SRF) and Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACF), clozapine coordinators are to ascertain if there are GPs or nursing staff that are able to conduct the physical health assessments. Questioning by facility staff may be required for the person's mental state and clozapine assessment. Eight week face to face assessments and review are to continue for these people, noting that there may be facility restrictions during a community transmission outbreak. It is noted that there is a mandated requirement for staff engaging with RACF to have their 2021 flu vaccination and their COVID-19 vaccination.

### **Six Monthly Psychiatric Reviews during Local Community Transmission**

Six monthly psychiatric review of stable participants and participants in shared care can be completed by medical staff through the use of video or teleconferencing. See [OCP COVID-19 MH fact sheet July 20 2021](#)

### **Suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19**

For people who are suspected cases of COVID-19, confirmed cases of COVID-19 or people who are on mandated home isolation, a home visit to undertake the required face to face assessment, is to be conducted using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as advised by each LHN's Novel Respiratory Pathogen Management Guideline.

Any confirmed case of COVID-19 in a person prescribed clozapine will be managed in an inpatient setting due to the increased risk of clozapine toxicity.

SA Pathology provides an in home phlebotomy service for any person unable to access a collection centre. SA Pathology domiciliary service can be contacted on 82223000

For clozapine and blood dyscrasias in people with COVID-19 see the [South London and Maudsley NHS Trust information](#)

## Clozapine Commencement

### Clozapine, COVID-19 Vaccination and Myocarditis

Clozapine is known to cause myocarditis, which typically presents within the first 14-28 days of commencement. During the initial 4 weeks of treatment, people are advised to monitor for signs and symptoms of myocarditis, as well as weekly monitoring of hs-CRP and Troponin during the commencement period.

Attention is drawn to the rare risk of myocarditis post administration of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines which includes Comirnaty (Pfizer) and Spikevax (Moderna).

- The risk of myocarditis may be greatest in young males
- Symptoms typically appear within 1-5 days of vaccination (median 2 days).
- Cases have primarily occurred within 14 days of vaccination
- The risk of myocarditis or pericarditis appears to be higher following the second dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) in conjunction with the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand emphasise the overwhelming benefits of vaccination using mRNA vaccine greatly outweigh the rare risk of myocarditis or pericarditis after vaccination. [Guidance on Myocarditis and Pericarditis after mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

In view of this, it is suggested factoring this into the decision regarding when to commence clozapine. Delaying clozapine commencement where possible until 14 - 21 days post the second dose of an mRNA vaccine may avoid uncertainty as to which agent is responsible for emergent myocarditis.

Due to the risk of side effects during the commencement of clozapine and potential for infection within the community at times of community transmission outbreaks, it is considered that new clozapine commencements place people at an increased level of risk during periods of community transmission.

If there is a clinical requirement for a person to be commenced on clozapine, the treating team is to:

- Communicate directly with the community team who would be assuming the care of the person including;
  - The community Consultant Psychiatrist has agreed to the proposed commencement
  - The community Clozapine Coordinator has been consulted regarding the proposed commencement
  - The community Head of Unit (HOU) has been consulted to ensure the team has capacity to provide the necessary follow up for the person to ensure safe and effective care within any Covid restrictions
- Once consent from the community team has been given make a request of the LHN Mental Health Drug Committee providing evidence of the community support for approval.

NB: if the community team have provided their support, the approval from the LHN Mental Health drug committee should be cursory.

As always, the best interest of the person is to be considered with the benefits of clozapine in potentially treating resistant psychosis, to be weighed against the additional risks of commencing and monitoring clozapine treatment during a community transmission outbreak.

## Annual Cardiac Assessments

The annual cardiac assessments, ECG and Echocardiograms (ECHO) scheduled for people during a time of community restrictions may be delayed by three months.

If there are concerns for a person's cardiac health it is recommended that specialist input be sought. Annual pathology assessments for Troponin and hs-CRP are still required to be taken with the regular pathology testing.

## GP Shared care participants who return to CMHS

Where a person is referred back to mental health services from a GP practice for ongoing care, their care is to be managed in line with the [Clozapine Management Clinical Guideline](#).

Where possible people, who were previously receiving their monitoring in GP shared care, should be encouraged to re-engage with their GP for ongoing monitoring as soon as practical when their GP and GP practice are again available.

## Social Distancing

Acknowledging COVID-19 risks, for all persons seen, practitioners should practice social distancing (including keeping at least 1.5 metres away from others) during interviews and practice hygiene measures (including frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitiser and wiping frequently touched surfaces). More details on social distancing can be read on the web links. Clinicians are to pay particular attention to the cleaning of equipment between individual use and clozapine clinic offices on a daily basis.

## COVID-19 Vaccination

### Clozapine toxicity and COVID-19 Vaccination

Cases of clozapine toxicity following COVID-19 Vaccination have been reported in SA and reported in the literature. It is recommended that clinicians actively following up people post their vaccination and educate them about signs and symptoms of clozapine toxicity. Please refer to the [Clozapine toxicity and Therapeutic Drug Monitoring Fact Sheet](#) which outlines signs and symptoms of toxicity and management. A serum clozapine level is recommended should signs of toxicity be evident.

Any adverse events, including raised serum clozapine levels following COVID-19 Vaccination must be reported to CPMS, the SA Vaccine Safety Surveillance System (SAVSS) and Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Raised clozapine serum levels have been reported with both [Pfizer](#) and [Astra Zeneca](#) COVID-19 vaccinations.

COVID-19 vaccinations are to be recorded on CBIS / CCCME, in further information, immunisations.

For public health information about COVID-19 please check:  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019)

## Education and Prevention

All contact with people is an opportunity to provide

1. Public health education and/or an information sheet about Coronavirus prevention
2. Mental health information related to the impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Support for people feeling overwhelmed, distressed or needing additional mental health support in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic is available through the COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line by calling 1800 632 753, available 8am – 8pm, seven days a week, or the Lived Experience Telephone Support Service (LETSS) 1800 013 755 available 5pm – 11.30pm seven days a week.

Fact sheets for people regarding COVID-19 and clozapine can be found on the Choice and Medication portal along with specific information regarding COVID-19 What Should You Do on the SA Health COVID-19 website.

## For more information

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