

ASA Position Statement: Return of diagnostic imaging services during COVID-19

13 May 2020



Key messages:

- The ASA supports the resumption of usual diagnostic ultrasound services gradually, with appropriate COVID-19 safety and infection control measures in place.
- Patients need access to the full range of sonographers provided medical diagnostic ultrasound examinations to diagnose and treat their medical conditions.
- As usual (non-essential) services resume, sonographers and employers must continue to adhere to the measures that protect patients, sonographers and other staff from COVID-19
- Access to and use of appropriate PPE is essential to support the reintroduction of services

With Australia and New Zealand's success in stemming the spread of COVID-19, the Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) supports the reintroduction of the full range of sonographer medical diagnostic imaging ultrasound services gradually whilst continuing to have measures to protect patients, sonographers and other staff.

Since the announcement of the pandemic on 11 March 2020, the measures put in place in Australia and New Zealand have been effective in flattening the curve. Due to the significant reduction in community transmission and low rates of hospitalisation, some of these restrictions are now easing. However, we do not know when or if there will be a vaccine for COVID-19.

In recent months, diagnostic imaging practices, cardiology practices, hospitals and other clinics where sonographers provide ultrasound services have all responded strongly to the threat of COVID-19. To achieve this, many examinations were delayed or deferred to a later time. Sonographers and workplaces also took up a variety of other measures, prioritising the delivery of referred services, altered hours of practice and changing processes to balance social distancing recommendations with the patients' medical needs.

As restrictions ease, patients will need access to the full range of sonographer provided medical diagnostic ultrasound examinations to diagnose and treat their medical conditions. However, it is imperative that increasing the type and number of ultrasound services offered to patients does not risk a COVID-19 resurgence. Many of the existing enhanced safety and infection control measures established during COVID-19 will need to remain in place.

Before the full range of ultrasound services resume, there should be strong consideration of what changes need to remain, and what needs to be put in place. Such as:

- Ensuring safe performance of ultrasound examinations, including the continuation of practices and processes that are in place for the protection of the sonographer, the patient and other staff.
- The need for ongoing modified patient booking and enhanced triage measures to reduce the risk of unnecessarily exposing the workplace to COVID-19
- Continued surveillance of patients and described processes to manage patients who deteriorate in the workplace
- Supporting increased communication between colleagues, patients and referrers in response to the changing needs and demands
- Continued access to, and use of, personal protective equipment (PPE).

This is also an opportunity to sustain and build on many of the process improvements and innovations that sonographers and their workplaces have come up with in response to COVID-19. Sonographers should be proud of how they have responded to this once-in-a-100-year crisis.

Sonographers' access to and use of PPE will continue to be required across many of the settings where they perform diagnostic ultrasound imaging examinations. If sonographers have poor availability to appropriate PPE, this significantly risks the health of the sonographer and their families; and unnecessarily risks the transmission of COVID-19 to other patients, medical staff and the community. In reintroducing the full range of ultrasound services, the ASA expects that appropriate PPE is available to sonographers, and the ASA will continue to advocate for the availability of PPE for sonographers.