SASA COVID-19 UPDATE

SASA
SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OF ANAESTHESIOLOGISTS

PACSA
PAEDIATRIC ANAESTHESIA COMMUNITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Dear Parents

You will be reading this letter because your child needs to have a procedure during the SARS-CoV-2 (or COVID-19) pandemic. It is essential that you understand how to best protect your child and our theatre staff during the time surrounding the proposed procedure.

General Information:

Covid-19 is a new disease which has only been around for a few months. As a result, what we know is constantly evolving. International data shows that children are less likely to get sick if infected and, if they do get sick, are more likely to get mild disease. Despite this, there is concern that patients who have had surgery and are either infected with Covid-19 at the time of surgery or who acquire this immediately after surgery suffer from a more severe form of the infection than they may have experienced, had they not had their surgery. This particular risk to children is however *not yet very clear* at all as doctors and scientists do not yet have enough cases to study.

The guidance in this letter has been drafted with our best knowledge to date, and is aimed at assisting you in making the best decision regarding issues surrounding your child's procedure . A procedure is usually a "family affair" and this is even more true during this pandemic. Your family should ideally self-isolate for at least a week before and after surgery, so as to try to avoid being infected with Covid-19 pre-operatively, as well as during the important phase of your child's recovery. If at any stage during this self-isolation period you, your family or your contacts:

- experience symptoms of Covid-19 or
- is diagnosed positive with Covid-19 or
- feels ill

please contact your surgeon and/ your anaesthetist in order to discuss the rescheduling of your child's surgery. This is important to protect everyone concerned.

Pre-operative Testing:

Only one parent or guardian will be permitted to accompany your child, so please make this decision prior to arrival at the hospital. Remember to bring as few belongings with you as possible and ideally bring your own pen to use for the screening questionnaires and forms.

The parent accompanying the child and your child may be asked to have a Covid-19 nasopharyngeal swab test performed before the day of the procedure. We know that patients may display no symptoms of the disease despite being actively infected with Covid-19. Optimally, you should have this test performed no more than 72 hours before your child's procedure date. It is important to note that patients may have a negative test result despite being infected – these are called 'false negative' results. Because of this, you will both still be required to wear a face mask during the entire hospital stay.

Hospital Infection Prevention Protocols:

Each hospital or clinic facility will be employing their own infection prevention measures. Please allow extra time for this. You will both have your temperatures taken, be required to wear a mask, complete a screening questionnaire and sanitise your hands at most entry points to the hospital and its wards. Please wear the screening sticker given to you after access has been granted.

The staff, doctors and nurses will all be wearing masks and a variety of personal protective equipment (PPE) ranging from gloves and gowns to full respirators, visors and goggles. This may be very daunting, especially for children at a time when they may already be stressed. Wherever possible, please prepare your child for this by reminding him/her that behind every mask and gown is a healthcare worker who is keeping you both safe from the virus as best they can. There are useful videos and visual aids that can be used to prepare your child. (see below for links or insert links here?) If need be, request that your anaesthetist and surgeon send a picture of themselves when they are in full PPE so your child knows what to expect and can have the time to ask questions and process any anxiety. Your reassurance and guidance in this regard is of critical importance.

Children who are not accustomed to wearing a mask may need a bit of practice with it at home in anticipation of their surgery. Make it fun, make it pretty or cool, and praise them for wearing it proudly. Encourage your child to talk about their surgery and hospital admission – you know your child best and will know best how to prepare him/her for the day.

Theatre lists do tend to take longer than usual, as waiting times between patients have increased in order to clean theatres even more thoroughly than before. Discuss the intake of clear fluid, like apple juice or water, with your child's anaesthetist, as this could greatly help with the hunger pangs. Also consider and discuss the option of pre-operative sedation for the child. This serves to alleviate anxiety on the part of the child.

Thank you in advance for your patience with the process, your respect for all the various infection control measures and for your vigilant efforts to try to protect yourself, your child and family from Covid-19 infection before and after their surgery. By doing so you also help to protect us. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact your anaesthetist to discuss these.

Be safe, stay healthy and we look forward to seeing you both in theatre - masks, visors, gloves and all!

Useful Resources:

How to wear a mask video

NICD website for Covid-19

SASA Covid-19 website

Explaining Covid-19 to Kids

Supporting Individuals With Autism

Operation Consent Form during Covid-19 Era

IOL News Article – Heroes don't wear capes