




# The impact of COVID-19 on liver health management

The COVID-19 liver health survey ran from August 2020 until January 2021 with 1/7th of respondents being from regional Victorian.

Respondents had a range of liver conditions, listed from highest to lowest incidence, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, cirrhosis, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, liver cancer, fibrosis, liver transplant, alcohol induced liver disease, hemochromatosis.



 **33%** **Impact** respondents felt their liver health care was impacted by COVID-19

## Results



**25%** **Medical appointments** were cancelled or deferred but only one of these had not yet had their appointment rescheduled.

“ Appointments cancelled and needed to be rescheduled. Blood tests were lost and [I] didn't receive them. ”



**50%** **Lifestyle changes** experienced changes to their lifestyle related to alcohol or drug consumption and other healthy lifestyle factors, with most increasing their alcohol consumption and exercising less.

“ Telehealth appointments, stressed the important of routine hep b blood work even during covid [I] deferred one check-up because I did not want to go into pathology centre to get blood work due to close proximity with others). ”

Increase[d] consumption of alcohol, less incidental exercise, weight gain. ”



### Attitudes

Most respondents felt that the medical system adapted well, or as well as possible with all considered, during the COVID-19 restrictions.

“ I understand the issues associated with the pandemic and accept the changes. I have nothing critical to say about my treatment. ”

## Conclusion

The survey revealed some improvements to the management of people's liver health due to COVID-19, however, a larger group or one third experienced detrimental impacts of adapting to living with the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many people found telehealth appointments to be less stressful and more convenient, especially rural respondents who would normally need to travel a distance for their appointments. However others raised concerns and negative consequences as a result of the inability to have face-to-face appointments.

There were concerns with delayed tests, appointments and results getting lost in the mail, and some preferred the personal relationships they had through face-to-face appointments and found having to share their story with new unknown people distressing and inefficient.

Earlier respondents (at the start of the survey's commencement August/September) expressed their disappointment with how services had adapted, whilst those responding closer to the end, (December/January) of the survey were more satisfied with how medical services were being delivered. Most respondents felt the medical system had adapted as best it could.

More than 50% of respondents experienced lifestyle changes related to their liver health. Of those who noted changes, one third experienced an increase in alcohol consumption and one third experienced a reduction in exercise. Dietary impacts were divided, with some finding the slower pace allowed them to take more time to cook themselves healthy meals, whilst others found they were eating more and less healthful foods.

## Recommendations



### Telehealth benefits

- Recommend telehealth be utilised more where possible for increased convenience, especially for rural Victorians needing to travel a distance for appointments.
- Many people are happy to attend telehealth appointments, however this should be optional. Often the referral for tests can be emailed or posted following telehealth.

**“** Had telephone consultation instead of travelling to Melbourne. A+ **”**



### Patient handover

- Where sensitive information must be conveyed to clinical practitioners, a handover to the replacement clinical staff would benefit people to avoid the stress of having to repeat all of one's story.

**“** [the] nurse I would normally see has been shifted, [so I] have to tell my story each time I visit. **”**



### Lifestyle coaching in lockdown

- Due to the high number of people who experienced unhealthy lifestyle changes during lockdown – more support needs to be provided to encourage healthy habits.

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