

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND HAEMOGLOBIN DISORDERS

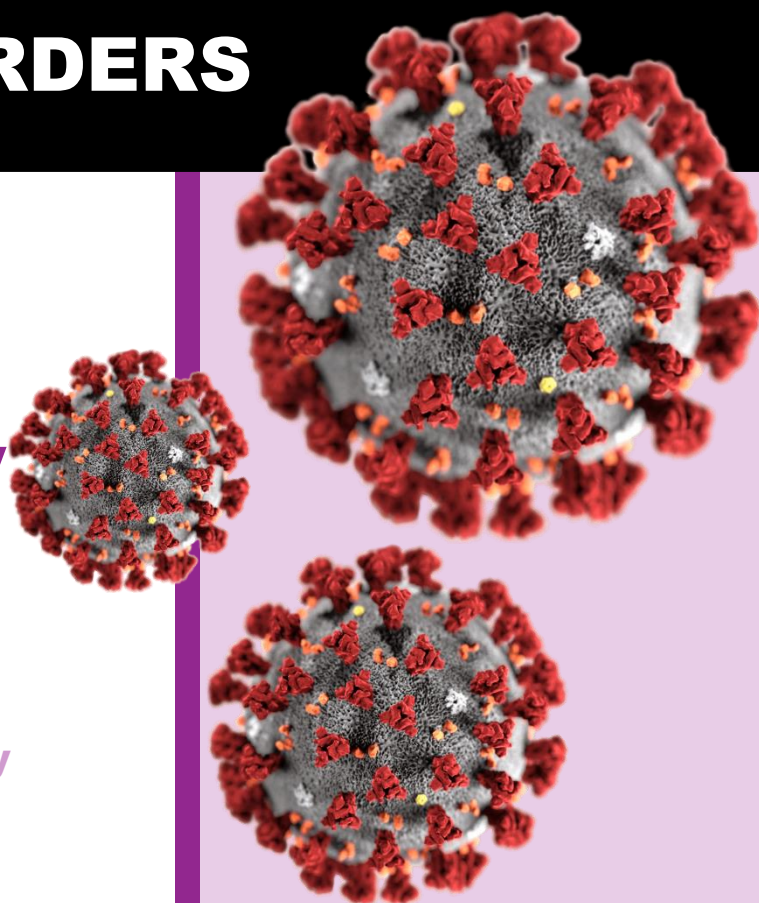
A TIF-proposed Haemoglobinopathy Patient Pathway

Recommendations for Day
Care Centres, Units and
Clinics treating patients
with thalassaemia and
sickle cell disease



THALASSAEMIA
INTERNATIONAL
FEDERATION

*Keeping our patients
healthy and safe
from COVID-19*



WHY AND WHAT CHANGES MUST BE CONSIDERED

The proposed Patient Care Pathway requires changes to be made during the outbreak of COVID-19 in the admittance of patients to haemoglobinopathy day care centres /units /clinics, with the aim to protect the individual patient, medical and other personnel as well as other patients visiting the centre/ unit/ clinic from possible coronavirus infection.

The two (2) major changes include:

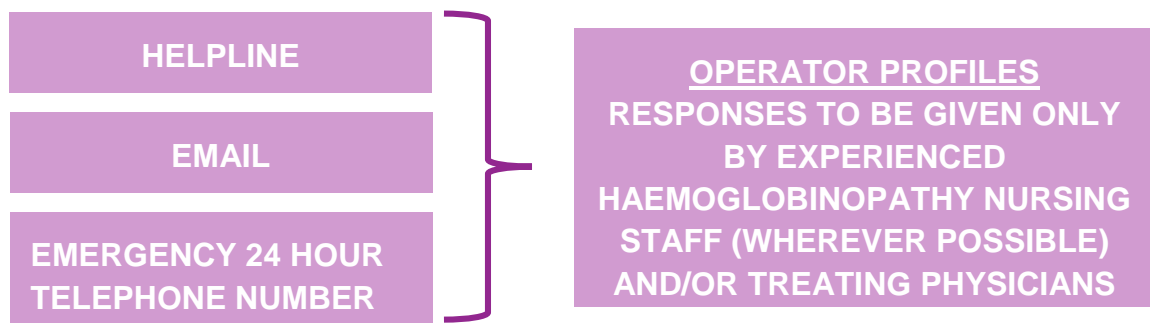
1. Strengthening of existing, and creation of new, **COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** between doctors, healthcare professionals and patients;
2. Promotion of a specific **PATIENT PATHWAY** to be as meticulously as possible followed in order to obtain access to, move within and exit day care centres/ units/ clinics, with particular attention to creation of dedicated, closed-off, disinfected areas for treating cases suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19 and;
 - i. Reforming **CARE** and **MONITORING PROTOCOLS** for clinical management, to include additional information / questions related to COVID-19 pandemic and;
 - ii. Re-arrangement, based on prioritization and individual patient needs of **MONITORING TESTS** (e.g. radiological, laboratory etc).

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

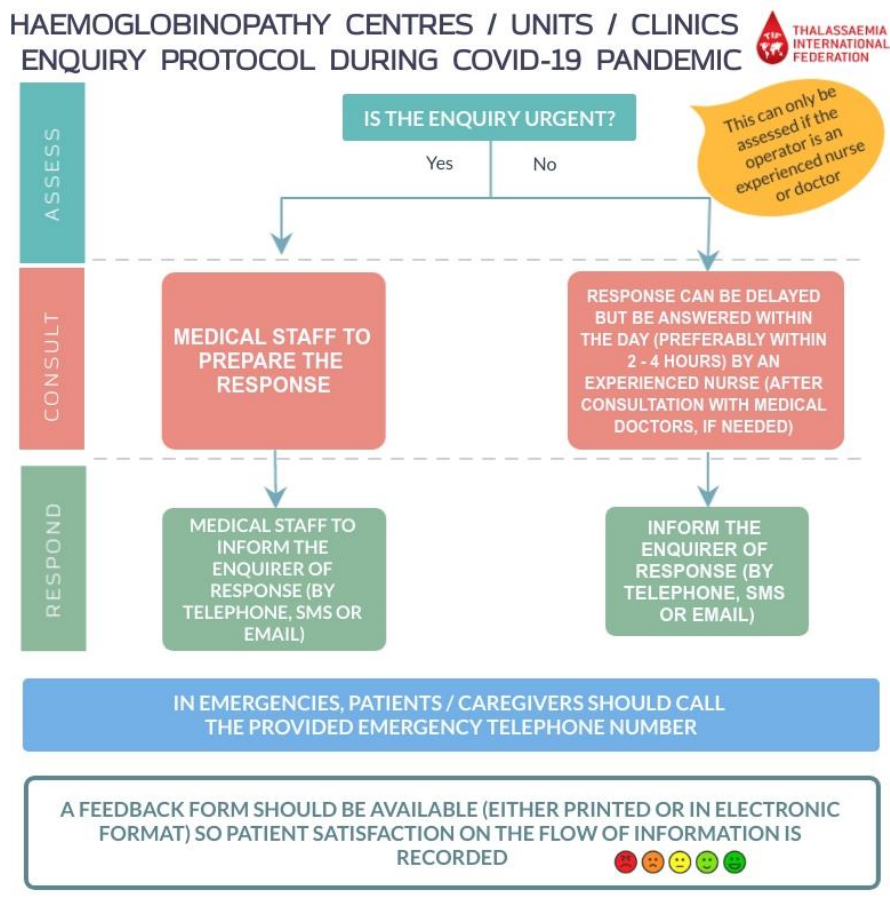
- Communication Channels & Tools that will facilitate information sharing from **PATIENTS/ CAREGIVERS** → **HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS** (A & B below)

Aim: To ensure appropriate responses to queries, timely reporting of symptoms relating to COVID-19 and to provide advice on necessary distancing or other measures that need to be taken.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIFIC CHANNELS & TOOLS:



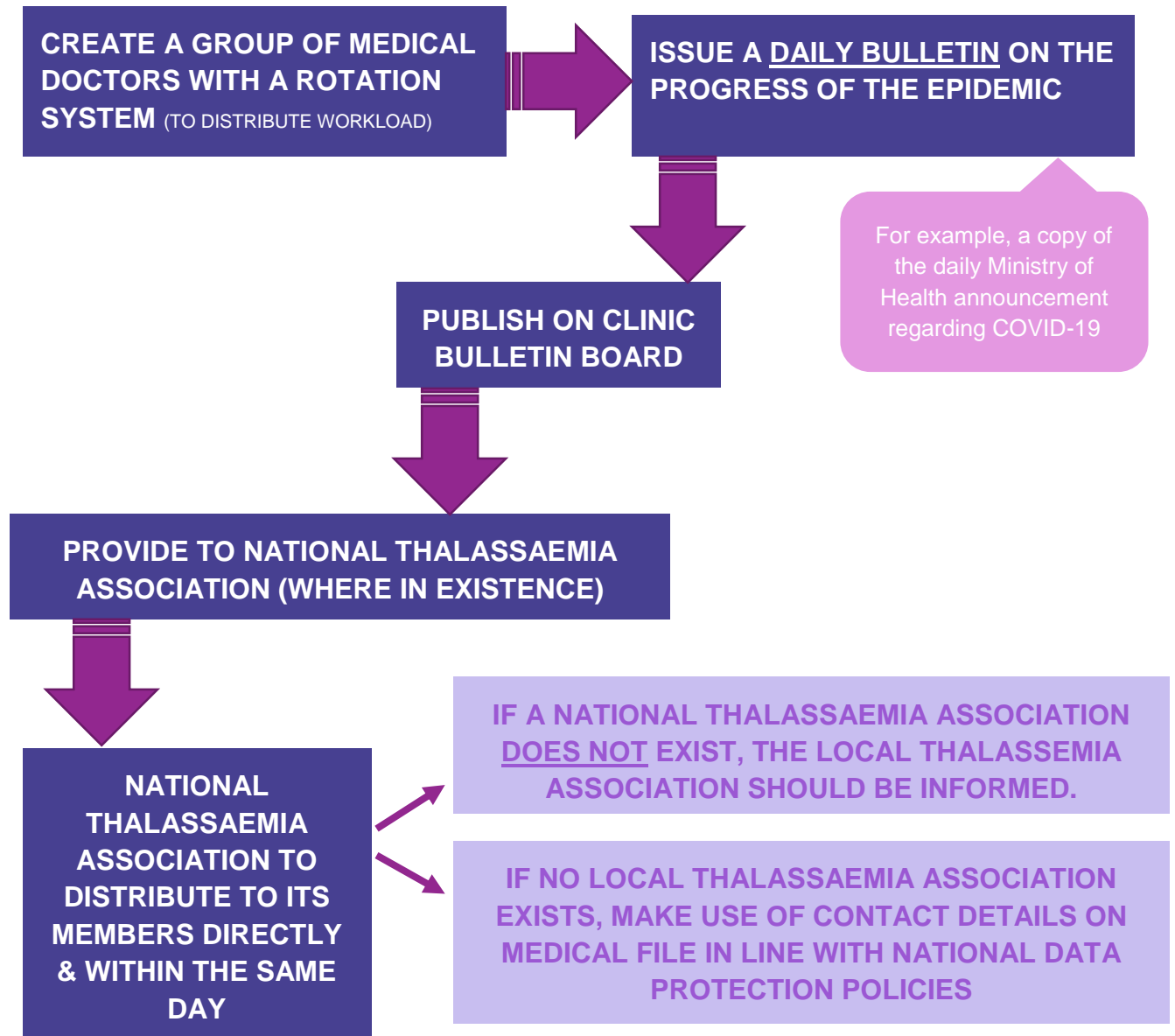
B. FOLLOW PROTOCOL FOR ANSWERING ENQUIRIES:



- Communication Channels & Tools that will facilitate information sharing from **HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS** → **PATIENTS/ CAREGIVERS**
(C below)

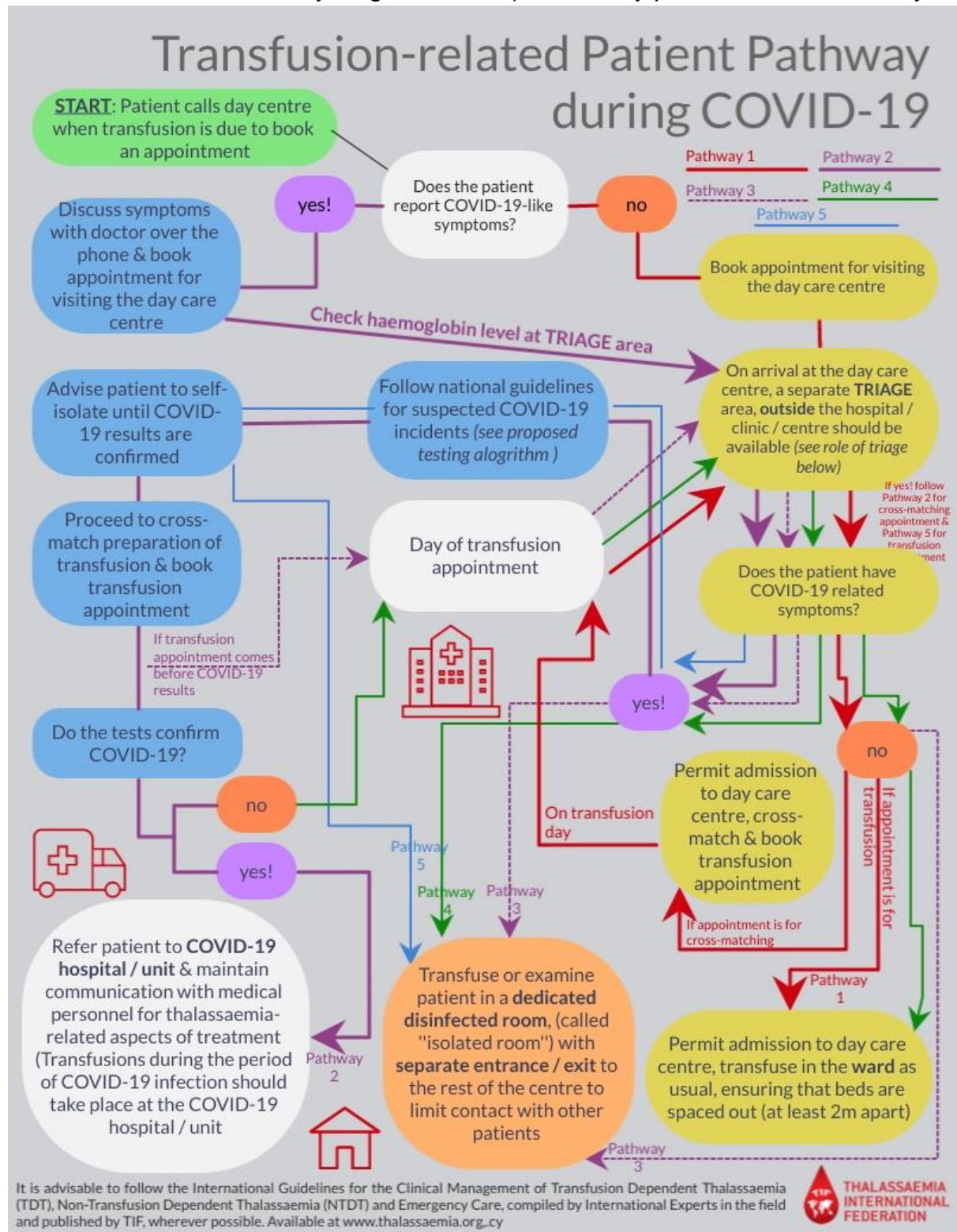
Aim: To provide information on latest national COVID-19 pandemic updates (e.g. no. of cases, government measures, hospital policies etc) to haemoglobinopathy patients.

C. MAINTAIN REGULAR FLOW OF QUALITY INFORMATION TO PATIENTS:

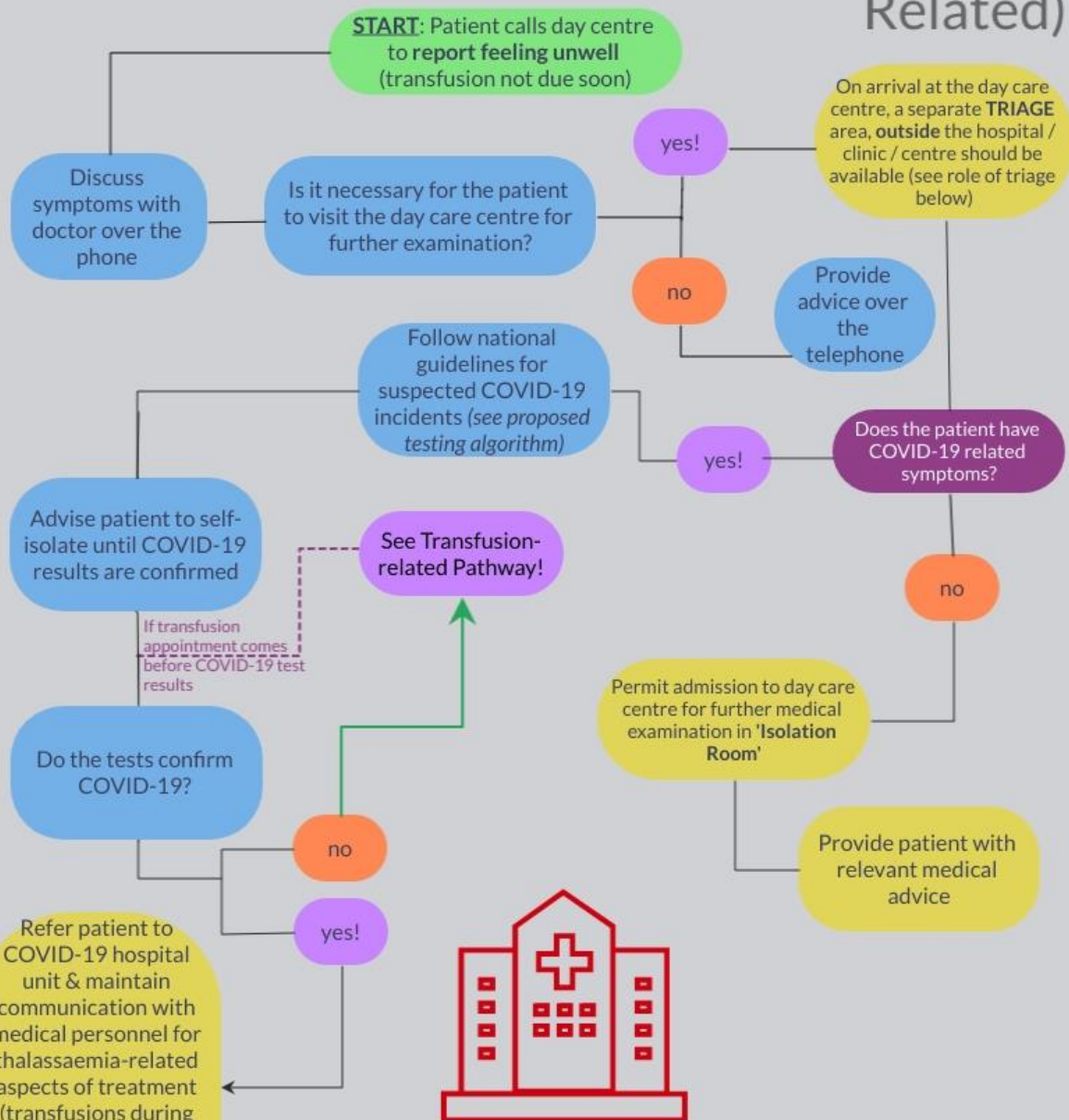


PATIENT CARE PATHWAY

- Any visit to the day care centre/ unit/ clinic should be **APPOINTMENT – BASED ONLY** and booked in advance via telephone or wherever available online appointment systems.
- The day care centre/ unit/ clinic is advised to carry out a **2-STEP TRIAGE** (as described in the Pathway diagrams below) before any patient enters the facility.



Haemoglobinopathy Patient Pathway during COVID-19 Outbreak (Not Transfusion Related)



It is advisable to follow the International Guidelines for the Clinical Management of Transfusion Dependent Thalassaemia (TDT), Non-Transfusion Dependent Thalassaemia (NTDT) and Emergency Care, compiled by International Experts in the field and published by TIF, wherever possible. Available at www.thalassaemia.org.cy



TRIAGE AREA

- **SCREENING** will be undertaken to grant permission for entering the day care centre / unit / clinic.
- This will be done by the **TRIAGE NURSE**, who wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (for more information see below) will ask a series of questions (as per national guidelines for COVID-19).
- The patient's Temperature, Pulse, Blood Pressure, Pulse Oximetry and Respiratory Rate will be checked.
- **FOR PATIENTS WITH HAEMOGLOBINOPATHIES (THALASSAEMIA AND SICKLE CELL DISEASE), HAEMOGLOBIN LEVEL SHOULD ALSO BE CHECKED.**
- If any COVID-19 symptoms are present (high temperature, dry cough etc) the triage nurse will consult with the treating physicians to decide granting admission to the day care centre / unit / clinic.
- If admittance is permitted, the patient should be taken to the '**ISOLATION ROOM**' where he/she will receive the medical care required by doctors and nurses wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (for more information see below)

Isolation Room: Haemoglobinopathy day care centre / units / clinics should designate a specific, dedicated room within the centre / unit / clinic which will be used to provide medical care to haemoglobinopathy patients who are suspected or a positive for COVID-19. This room should ideally have a separate entrance / exit to the rest of the centre / unit / clinic so as to limit contact with other patients thus preventing transmission of COVID-19. The room should be disinfected regularly.

DIAGNOSING COVID-19: PROPOSED TESTING ALGORITHM

FOR AN INDIVIDUAL PATIENTS WITH THALASSAEMIA OR SICKLE CELL DISEASE WITH SYMPTOMS RELATED TO CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS RUN TESTS FOR COVID-19 AND IN PARALLEL RUN TESTS FOR OTHER COMMON FLU VIRUSES

CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS MAY CO-EXIST WITH OTHER FLU VIRUSES IN THE SAME INDIVIDUAL

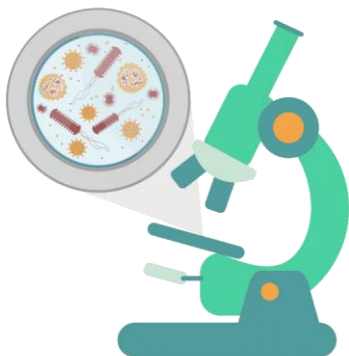
NASOPHARYNGEAL SAMPLES & RNA TESTING ARE CONSIDERED THE MOST APPROPRIATE.

COVID-19 RNA TESTING SHOULD BE PERFORMED AT ONE OF THE REFERENCE LABORATORIES (ASSIGNED BY THE NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES)

IF NEGATIVE TO ALL TESTING, THE INDIVIDUAL SHOULD PRACTISE SOCIAL DISTANCING / STAY AT HOME FOR 14 DAYS (AS ALSO RECOMMENDED BY NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES AND WHO)

IF POSITIVE TO COVID-19 TESTING, THE LABORATORY SHOULD REPORT THE RESULTS TO NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES, WHO IN TURN SHOULD INFORM THE TREATING PHYSICIAN AND FOLLOW NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR MONITORING AND/OR TREATING COVID-19, AS PER NATIONAL PROTOCOLS

IF POSITIVE TO ANY OTHER THAN COVID-19 VIRUSES, TREATMENT AND CARE IS PROVIDED AS APPROPRIATE BY TREATING PHYSICIANS



THE HAEMOGLOBINOPATHY TREATING PHYSICIAN SHOULD ALWAYS PROVIDE THE PATIENTS' FULL MEDICAL HISTORY AND MAINTAIN VERY CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN ANY OF THE COVID-19 UNITS OR CLINICS THAT THE PATIENT IS REFERRED TO, ACCORDING TO NATIONAL GUIDELINES

MONITORING TESTS

- Full blood count, pre-transfusion haemoglobin levels and ferritin tests **should continue** as usual (in accordance to the precautions outlined in the Haemoglobinopathy Patient Pathways, see pages 5 & 6) for the duration of the COVID-19 epidemic.
- Annual routine monitoring tests (i.e. MRI, Ferriscan, DEXA, Ophthalmology & Audiology) for patients who have low iron load and are stable **should be postponed** until after the end of the epidemic, unless the treating physician advises otherwise.

NO MEDICATION SHOULD BE DISCONTINUED WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS / CONSENT OF THE TREATING PHYSICIAN

Ibuprofen & COVID-19: Concerns have been raised on the impact of taking ibuprofen to relieve COVID-19 symptoms. Until more evidence is available, patients are advised to consider other medications, such as paracetamol, and talk to their doctors. Always be mindful of allergies before taking any medication.

Blood Groups & COVID-19: Susceptibility to the SARS-CoV-2 virus (responsible for COVID-19) by any particular blood group has not been scientifically proven. Evidence and published literature show that COVID-19 is distributed across blood groups and no blood group has an exceptional vulnerability to the virus.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Communication Channels:

- Helpline – telephone devices
- Set up a separate email address
- Emergency telephone number

Patient Pathway:

- Designated triage area outside the clinic (no connection with the clinic)
- Separate, isolation room for patients with COVID-19 who require transfusions

Equipment for healthcare professionals:

- Personal protective equipment, including but not limited to gloves, gowns/aprons, goggles or face shields, facemasks and respirators¹.

¹ World Health Organisation, 2020 https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPPE_use-2020.2-eng.pdf

HOW TO STAY SAFE DURING COVID-19

- Follow the advice given by your National Health Authorities and the World Health Organization (see *graphics below*)
- If you feel unwell, contact your treating physician / team as soon as possible
- If you think you have COVID-19, **DO NOT GO TO THE DAY CARE CLINIC!!!** This will result in possibly infecting doctors, nurses and other patients. Call ahead to **make an appointment**.
- Refer to TIF's publications regarding COVID-19 available at <https://thalassaemia.org.cy/covid-19-pandemic/tif-material-on-covid-19/>

Protect yourself and others from getting sick

Wash your hands

- after coughing or sneezing
- when caring for the sick
- before, during and after you prepare food
- before eating
- after toilet use
- when hands are visibly dirty
- after handling animals or animal waste




Wash your hands

Wash your hands with soap and running water when **hands are visibly dirty**



If your **hands are not visibly dirty**, frequently clean them by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water




Protect others from getting sick

When coughing and sneezing **cover mouth and nose** with flexed elbow or tissue



Throw tissue into closed bin immediately after use



Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water after coughing or sneezing and when caring for the sick




Protect others from getting sick

Avoid close contact when you are experiencing cough and fever



Avoid spitting in public



If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing **seek medical care early** and share previous travel history with your health care provider




How to Wash Your Hands

The 12 Step Checklist



World Health Organization



Cleaning Agents: Soap & Water.



Duration: 40 – 60 Seconds.



1

Wet your hands with water.



2

Apply soap to cover all of the surfaces of your hands.



3

Rub your hands, palm to palm.



4

Move your right hand over your left hand with interlaced fingers, and vice versa.



5

Ensure your hands are palm to palm and your fingers are interlaced.



6

The backs of your fingers should be matched to your opposing palms with your fingers interlocked.



7

Rotationally rub your left thumb in your clasped right hand and vice versa.



8

Continue rotational rubbing backwards and forwards with your clasped fingers of your right hand in your left palm and vice versa.



9

Rinse your hands with water.



10

Dry your hands thoroughly with a single use towel.



11

Use the towel to turn off the faucet.



12

Your hands are now washed correctly.

WHAT IS SOCIAL DISTANCING?²

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

They are to:

1. Always keep 1 – 3 metres distance from any other person
2. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
3. Avoid non-essential use of public transport when possible
4. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this.
5. Avoid large and small gatherings in public spaces.
6. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
7. Use telephone or online services to contact your doctor or other essential services



HOW TO SELF-ISOLATE³

- Stay at home. Do not go to the day unit, work, school or public places.
- Do not use public transport or taxis. Ask friends and family or delivery services to do errands for you.
- Try to avoid having visitors at home. It is okay for friends, families and delivery people to drop off food.
- You may need to do this for up to 14 days to help reduce the possible spread of infection.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults#summary-of-advice>

³ <https://ukts.org/heads-up/coronavirus-information/>

FURTHER READING

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/coronavirus>

CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

THALASSAEMIA INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION – RESOURCES ON COVID-19:

- The COVID-19 Pandemic & Haemoglobin Disorders
- A Useful Health & Nutrition Short Guide for the COVID-19 Pandemic

Available at <https://thalassaemia.org.cy/covid-19-pandemic/tif-material-on-covid-19/>

****Coming Soon****

TIF's COVID-19 Bulletin

To be published on TIF's website & social media

A weekly update including the latest news on scientific developments for Treatments, Vaccines, Diagnosis, and Monitoring Tests

Stay Safe – Stay Informed!

TIF COVID-19 HELP DESK & COMMUNICATION LINE

To facilitate contact with our members and patients, we have created a Help Desk & Communication Line, specifically for issues concerning the COVID-19 outbreak!

YOU CAN REACH US DIRECTLY AT TIF-COVID19@THALASSAEMIA.ORG.CY