



Dear Western Australia

This is a letter for each and every one of you.

It is not normal for us, as the Patron and Executive Director of Telethon Kids Institute, to be reaching out to you like this, but this is not a normal situation.

We are facing a pandemic the likes of which none of us have seen in our lifetimes. It is very real and it is very frightening. More so, because there's so much about COVID-19 that we just don't know. We know it's highly contagious because we've seen the destruction it has caused in other countries. We know its impact goes well beyond our health - affecting our economy, our jobs, our loved ones and our way of life. And we know it's here already, in our community.

In WA, we are right at the beginning of community transmission. This is a critical moment for our State. We will either get this right or spectacularly wrong - and that is up to every single one of us.

At Telethon Kids our job in all of this, as medical researchers, is to work with our colleagues across the world to find the answers. To do the research that is urgently needed so we can contain the spread of this virus and minimise its impact on our community. We also have a job to do in working closely with the Government and public health authorities to give them the best possible advice, based upon the latest evidence available to us.

We've investigated the data and spoken at great lengths with our colleagues across the globe who are experiencing first-hand the impacts of this virus in their communities. Based upon this evidence, we have given very clear advice to the Government to be much more active in testing people; ensure people with proven infection are truly isolated until they are not infectious; strictly ensure home quarantining is understood and implemented; close WA's borders; and strengthen controls and consequences for those who choose not to abide by the rules on social distancing.

If our Government introduces all of these measures we will be part way there – the rest is up to us as individuals. The only way that we are going to 'flatten the curve' and not head down the same path as other countries like Italy, is if every single member of the West Australian community does the right thing.

Right now, that's not happening. As experts and parents, that's more terrifying to us than the virus itself.

We are hearing stories daily of people downplaying the severity of this pandemic. We've heard stories of people grocery shopping while waiting to receive their test results or ignoring advice and socialising during their 14-day quarantine period. This behaviour is how this virus is spreading. It only takes one person to ignore the advice and it will impact hundreds if not thousands of others.

We are writing to plead with you to do the right thing – right now.

Practice meticulous **hand hygiene** and teach the kids how important it is too. We know everyone is telling you to do this, but as scientists we can tell you why. It's very simple. SARS-COV-2 (the name for the virus that causes COVID-19) is mostly spread by droplets. So when a person coughs or sneezes into their hands, the virus contaminates their hands plus any nearby surfaces it hits. That person could then touch more surfaces and contaminate them too. The virus can survive up to 72 hours on hard surfaces like supermarket trollies, handrails, doorknobs, phones and laptops. You can't see it and the object won't look any different, so you just don't know that it is there. The only way to protect yourself is to keep washing your hands and avoid touching your face. It's one of the greatest defences you have.

Social distancing means stay away from others. Don't go to public places. Don't picnic at the river in big groups. Reschedule that catch up or birthday party you had planned. Encourage the kids to play in the backyard instead of the playground. Stay away from one another. If you do need to go out for groceries, go alone, go quickly and pick a quieter time to go. And practice all of this in your own homes too – each family member could potentially infect the rest of the family, so social distancing, hand hygiene, not sharing towels and cutlery are just as important at home as elsewhere.

If you or anyone in your family has been in contact with a proven case of COVID-19, you need to **isolate** yourselves. Isolation means isolation. It doesn't mean take the kids to the park or go and get a haircut. It doesn't mean invite people over or try and sneak in one more trip to the shops. It means stay at home and stay away from others until you're officially in the clear.

Be calm and be kind. Western Australians have always had a reputation for being friendly, warm, compassionate people – we need this now more than ever. Take care of our elderly – keep your distance but find other ways to stay connected. Offer neighbours in need some help. Don't hoard groceries out of fear because it's only hurting others. Listen to the advice from our experts and please do what they ask.

If we can do all of this, it gives us a fighting chance. It means our frontline healthcare workers and the system itself will be able to cope as the virus moves through our community. It means we will have the resources available to provide the best possible care to those it affects, and it means that medical experts and researchers like ourselves will be able to get in front of this pandemic and find solutions to this incomprehensible disease.

We *will* get through this WA but only if we do it together. We hope we can count on you.

Warm regards,



Professor Jonathan Carapetis AM
Executive Director, Telethon Kids Institute



Professor Fiona Stanley AC
Patron, Telethon Kids Institute

telethonkids.org.au

