

The game of Bridge in the COVID-19 era

A discussion paper for the Australian Bridge Federation (ABF)

Critical summary:

- COVID-19 is a new disease, so there is no existing immunity in the human community. This means that COVID-19 could & does spread widely and quickly.
- There is currently no specific effective treatment for COVID-19 infection, or any vaccine. It remains unclear whether good, sustained immunity is gained by those who recover from COVID-19 infection.
- COVID-19 spreads readily from person to person:– droplets (cough or sneeze) either directly from an infected person or touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) which have droplet contamination from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.
- Infected people can spread virus for up to 48 hours before showing any symptoms themselves.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from very mild illness to pneumonia. Some people will recover easily, while others may get very sick, very quickly.
- Those most at risk of serious illness and death include:
 - all people 70 years & older
 - all people over 65 with chronic medical conditions especially diabetes and hypertension
 - all people with compromised immune systems.
- There is little, if any, benefit in asymptomatic healthy people routinely wearing masks from day to day. Masks worn by infected people reduce the spread to others.

What does this mean for the bridge community here & world-wide:

- Bridge players fit the at-risk demographic in many ways – older, increased incidence of diabetes, hypertension, lung & other chronic diseases.
- Bridge players usually sit within 1.5m of each other, usually for 20+ minutes. Adjacent tables add to the proximity risk.
- Bridge playing rooms are usually closed and air-conditioned spaces. Most air-conditioning systems or units will exhaust and recycle the room air, but might not provide effective viral filtration.
- Many items at bridge sessions are touched by many people – cards, bidding boxes and pads, travellers, pens, refreshment cups & plates.

What pre-requisite is there for club & congress bridge to resume in the near future? The National “3 STEP FRAMEWORK FOR A COVID-SAFE AUSTRALIA” (attached) dictates that the most liberal ‘STEP 3’ is a necessary pre-condition. Clubs will then need to set up a COVID-19 prevention structure with protocols and rules which follow the best medical advice. ABF issues model guidelines for clubs to adopt and modify for their specific needs. The guidelines will be derived from published official information.

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Preamble:

This document provides key information on COVID-19. It is derived from the National COVID-19 website. The document aims to inform your plans regarding the eventual resumption of bridge at your club. It should be read in conjunction with “ABF guide for restarting face-to-face bridge in the COVID-19 era”.

Your club is responsible for ensuring that all members & visitors understand that COVID-19 is a real and major threat. Your club is strongly advised not to 'water down' any directives or guidelines, and to comply with national & your state/territory regulations as and when they are issued and updated.

The 3-Step Plan to a COVIDSafe Australia maps out a pathway states and territories can take to ease restrictions in the coming months, depending on their circumstances. Each state and territory will move forward at their own pace. Club & congress bridge is NOT currently permitted under the easing of restrictions by 'STEP 1' and 'STEP 2'.

Restrictions are being eased variably across Australia. It is very important to understand that this is not because COVID-19 has been beaten or that the risk is small or that Australia is through the worst and things will only get better. The truth is that we don't know how the next phase of this global pandemic will play out in Australia.

Place this message in the context of Australia & N Zealand having so far had very few cases per head of population over the last 4 months. In Australia – 7,200 cases and 103 deaths across our population of 25 million; less than 20 new cases nationally per day in recent weeks. (1 June 2020)

A second wave of infection is considered by experts to be inevitable, as restrictions are slowly relaxed. This will cause spot outbreaks & hot-spots. The outbreaks will see restrictions again tightened – maybe in a limited area, or across a State/Territory or even throughout Australia.

Once bridge clubs are permitted to resume playing face-to-face sessions, they will first need to set up a COVID-19 prevention structure with protocols and rules which follow the best medical advice.

ABF issues model guidelines for clubs to adopt and modify for their specific needs. The guidelines will be derived from published official information.

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What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new form of coronavirus. It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild illness to pneumonia. Some people will recover easily, and others may get very sick very quickly. People with coronavirus may experience symptoms such as fever, respiratory symptoms, coughing, sore throat, shortness of breath. Other symptoms can include runny nose, headache, muscle or joint pains, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, loss of sense of smell, altered sense of taste, loss of appetite and fatigue.

Symptom checker: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/healthdirect-coronavirus-covid-19-symptom-checker>

To stop the spread of COVID-19 people with even mild symptoms of respiratory infection are encouraged to get tested. Testing: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#testing>

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person including in the 48 hours before they had symptoms.
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze.
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

Who is most at risk?

People who are, or are more likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they get the virus are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- people 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions
- people 70 years and older
- people with compromised immune systems

At this stage the risk to children and babies, and the role children play in the transmission of COVID-19, is not clear. However, there has so far been a low rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases among children, relative to the broader population. There is limited evidence at this time regarding the risk in pregnant women.

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Reduce your risk of coronavirus:

- **You MUST isolate yourself at home if you feel sick.**
- **Wash hands often with soap and running water, for at least 20 seconds.** Dry with paper towel or hand dryer.
- **Buy** an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with over 60 per cent alcohol. If you don't have access to soap and water (e.g. when away from home) then use alcohol-gel rubs liberally.
- **Don't** touch your eyes, nose or mouth unless you have soap and water washed your hands correctly.
- **Don't** shake hands, embrace or kiss.
- **Cover** your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow.
- **Phone** your GP first if you need medical attention.
- **Continue** healthy habits: exercise, drink water, get plenty of sleep.
- **Don't** wear a face mask if you are well. (see next para)
- **Get** the flu shot.

See: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/good-hygiene-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

Regarding face masks: there is a clear benefit in COVID-19 positive people wearing a mask to protect others; masks might become mandatory for public transport travellers and others forced into close proximity. Presently in Australia, with low numbers of ongoing cases in the community, wearing a face mask when you can effectively keep your social distance is not significantly protective.

Advice on public gatherings:

See: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/limits-on-public-gatherings-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

In the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic a National Cabinet formulated a consensus plan across Australia. That has now been succeeded by individual state/territory plans.

States & territories have ultimate authority in all aspects of public health. This makes it mandatory for state/territory bridge bodies & individual clubs to stay up-to-date and comply with the latest directives and advice for your state/territory.

ACT: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

NSW: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

NT: <https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/>

QLD: <https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/>

SA: <https://www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/>

TAS: <https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/>

VIC: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

WA: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/covid-19-coronavirus>