



SPLEEN AUSTRALIA

Information for people living without
a functioning spleen

HEALTH UPDATE

VOLUME #2

October 2021

Spleen Australia
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To help us support you, it is vital we have your up to date contact details: mobile/home numbers, personal email details and postal address. Please contact us by email or phone and let us know of any changes.

Check your eligibility for a COVID-19 vaccine

Visit the Health Department's website to see when and where you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

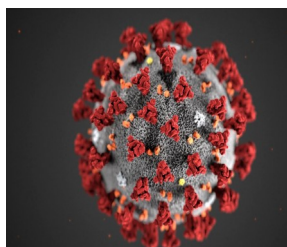
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker>

Latest updates are available at
<https://www.australia.gov.au>



AlfredHealth

COVID-19 Update



The last 18 months have been very difficult, and we understand that our patients might be particularly concerned about the risks of COVID-19 associated with not having a functioning spleen. We will continue to provide up to date information on our website.

Our takeaway messages are:

- There is now more information from the UK, USA and elsewhere saying that people without a functioning spleen may have a slightly increased risk of getting COVID-19. **The reason why you had your spleen removed and any ongoing medical treatments could add to this risk.** Additionally, if you get a viral infection you may get a secondary bacterial infection (e.g. pneumonia). So, it's very **important to get the COVID vaccines, be up to date with your 'spleen vaccines,' take your daily antibiotics (if prescribed), and have an emergency supply of antibiotics.**

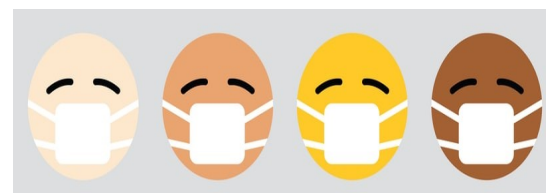


- We recommend that all our patients be fully vaccinated. The COVID vaccines are very effective at preventing serious disease and lessen your chances for an admission to hospital/ICU. The side effects are very rare. If you are unsure about getting the vaccine please talk with your GP about this. **"Get the injection, not the infection!"**

Refer to our website that includes links to Government updates.

How to stay healthy

- Get vaccinated
- Wear a mask
- Clean your hands
- Log in with QR codes
- Maintain socially distanced practices
- See a doctor promptly if you become unwell



Ask your GP if you are due for any 'spleen vaccines'. ALL these vaccines are FREE. They are stored in the GP's fridge.



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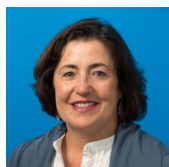
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Spleen Australia is excited to introduce the newest members of our team



Penelope Jones

We have three new nurse coordinators joining the service. Penelope Jones (Penny), our manager and Amber Plumley, Administration Officer, wish to welcome them to the team. Amber is responsible for our website and developing our health updates. We have been extremely busy since the start of the COVID pandemic, answering 1000s of calls and emails about COVID and the vaccines. Its been an important part of the service to keep our patients healthy.



Amber Plumley



Sharon O'Brien

Sharon O'Brien has worked at the Alfred Hospital in many different roles including 10 years at the Trauma Registry as well as research, clinical nursing, patient coordination & emergency management. She has over 25 years' experience working on the trauma ward. Sharon is also a qualified immunisation nurse. She has developed a strong commitment to empowering our patients by offering an 'education package' in order to help patients reduce their chances of sepsis. She is also keen to be part of any of Spleen Australia's research projects. In her spare time she loves the outdoors, cycling, walking, camping, as well as supporting the Western Bulldogs!



Bryony Hanton

Bryony Hanton joins Spleen Australia after a lengthy career working in ICU at The Alfred hospital. She continues to work in the ICU and will be doing extra shifts during the pandemic. Bryony has cared for many patients after their splenectomies in hospital. She is enjoying getting to know the Spleen Australia patients and supporting them with their healthcare needs. Bryony enjoys spending time with her young family when not at work.

Sharon Willems has many years of nursing experience. After 12 years working at the Alfred Hospital as a clinical nurse in the specialist field of Infectious Diseases, Sharon has decided to work supporting people with a non-functioning spleen. She is also a qualified Nurse Immuniser. Outside work, Sharon is a keen gardener of succulent plants and dressmaking.



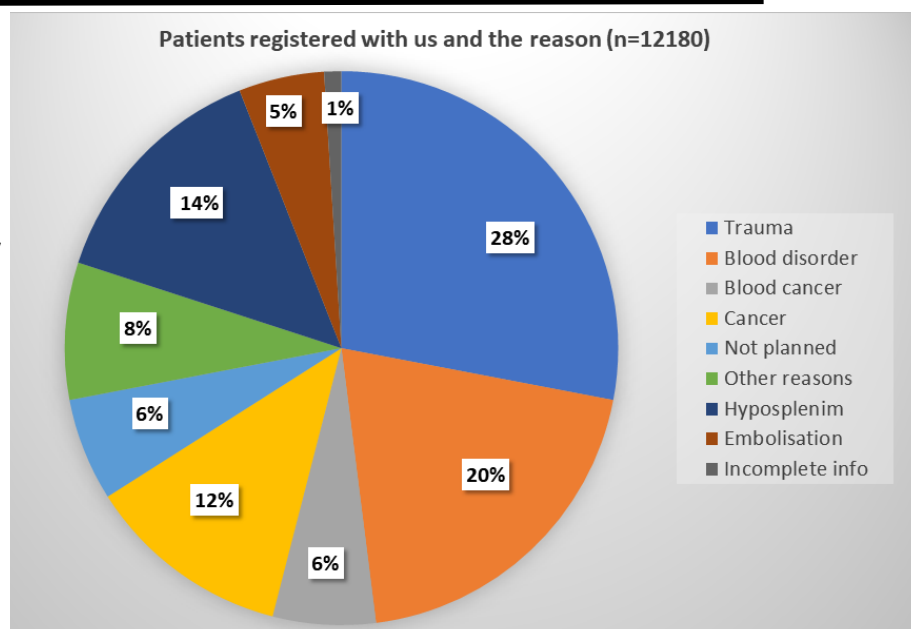
Sharon Willems

A/Prof Denis Spelman is the medical Director of Spleen Australia and supported by A/Prof Ian Woolley. They are both infectious diseases physicians.

We wish to thank and acknowledge Cate Bunn, Nigel Pratt (retired), and Natasha Asgari for their wonderful contributions to the ongoing development of the service.

As always, we welcome any suggestions you may have on how we can improve our service.

To date there are **12,180** patients registered with us, with ages ranging from 1 day old to 92 years old. Patients can reside in Victoria, Queensland or Tasmania. This pie chart shows why people have had a splenectomy or been diagnosed with a non functioning spleen (hyposplenism), or undergone a splenic artery embolisation.





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RESEARCH PROJECTS

(1) THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PEOPLE LIVING WITHOUT A FUNCTIONING SPLEEN



Alistair de Boer is an Honorary Research Assistant from Melbourne University who has a special interest in conditions of the spleen as this organ plays such an important function in how humans fight infections. Alistair is assisting Spleen Australia in the development of a research study investigating how and if COVID-19 has any impact on people living without a functioning spleen. He is looking forward to contributing to research in this important field. The types of questions the study will ask are: employment, mental health impacts and general concerns our patients have had regarding their spleen condition and COVID-19.

The study has been approved by the ethics boards of both the Alfred and Monash Hospitals, and is being overseen by Associate Professor Ian Woolley, an Infectious Diseases physician who is on the board of Spleen Australia. This study will be a five-minute **online** questionnaire that will be **emailed** to you.

As this study will be both anonymous and private, we encourage everyone to participate. While your time will be voluntary for this research, your responses will provide us with a valuable insight into the effects COVID-19 has had on our patients. Please look out for this information in your email inbox. Thank you for helping Alistair by answering the survey questions.



(2) SPLEEN RESEARCH STUDY – People who live in Victoria are NEEDED!

The Coeliac Research Team based at Melbourne Health and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute are seeking volunteers who have had their spleen removed for an important new research study.

Coeliac disease, a common immune illness caused by gluten in the diet, is believed to be a major cause of poor spleen function. People with coeliac disease have increased susceptibility to the same infections as people who have had their spleens removed. This study aims to understand this problem to improve patient management.

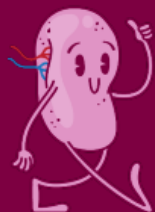
Who can help? Adults (aged 18-70) who have had their **spleen removed for any reason**.

What is involved? A single visit to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute (next to the Royal Melbourne Hospital in Parkville) for a blood test. This appointment will be **after lockdown**. The blood will undergo detailed antibody level and immune function testing. This research has been approved by Melbourne Health Human Ethics Committee.

If you think you can help and wish to find out more please contact **Lee** on email: coeliac@wehi.edu.au or leave a message with your details on 9345 2883. Lee will then keep your name and contact you when you can come to see her. **Many thanks!!**



Spleen Australia acknowledges ongoing funding from Victorian Department of Health, Queensland Health, Department of Health Tasmania



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SPLEEN AUSTRALIA INTRODUCES OUR PATRON, DARYL BRAITHWAITE



We all know Daryl – ex-Sherbet front man, internationally famed for all his wonderful songs including the No 1 hit “Horses” that is played at hundreds of weddings around Australia.

In 2016, Daryl had a splenectomy for a gastric problem. He hadn’t faced any health issues in the past, so it was an unexpected and a scary experience. Daryl felt that the care he got in hospital was fantastic and that Spleen Australia has been there to answer all of his questions.

Daryl is now giving back to the community by kindly agreeing to be the Patron for Spleen Australia. He is very keen to support people who do not have a functioning spleen, and has continued to support his health during the COVID-19 pandemic by getting vaccinated.

“I fully support that people without spleens seriously consider getting a COVID-19 vaccination. I am booked in for my second AstraZeneca vaccine this month ”.

Seek medical attention if you have any of these signs and symptoms. If you cannot see a doctor promptly, start your treatment by taking your emergency supply of antibiotics.

In order to prevent **SEPSIS (severe infection)** please see a doctor if you have any of these signs and symptoms.

Take your emergency supply of antibiotics if you are unable to see a doctor promptly, as this will start the treatment.



Fever



Exhaustion



Can't Get Warm



Vomiting



Headaches



Diarrhoea



Confusion



Spleen Australia

AlfredHealth

Carry your spleen wallet alert card at all times in case you are sick—showing it to your GP or at the hospital will ensure you see a doctor as quickly as possible. Call us if you have lost your card.