



at St Vincent's Private Hospital East Melbourne

COVIt->-19: Current Advice for Patients Attending Appointments

Please note that these recommendations are current as of **24/01/22** and will continue to change

- There is currently a NO visitor policy for hospital inpatients at St Vincent's Private East Melbourne and NO accompanying persons policy for routine appointments in the Gipps St consulting suites.
- **We ask** that you come alone to your appointment.
- Accompanying persons are currently not permitted in the waiting area or the consulting room for routine appointments. If this is an issue for you, you may wish to postpone your appointment, however it is unclear at this time when the current policy will change.
- As a specialist clinical breast examination is an essential component of your routine breast review, a Telehealth consultation is not an appropriate substitute for an in-person review.

The pandemic has resulted in a significant and growing backlog of routine in-office review appointments. We suspended many reviews in 2020/2021, and patients underwent their routine breast imaging, but did not attend for specialist clinical breast examination. I am not comfortable with deferring clinical breast examination 2 years in succession, and as my schedule is booked to capacity, the only way to create sufficient appointment slots is for many patients who attend for routine review to be seen by one of my specialist surgical colleagues, either [Dr Cathie Poliness](#) or [Dr Eugenia Ip](#) in place of myself, both of whom are themselves specialist breast surgeons, and together coordinate the routine long term follow up service. All breast cancer patients are already routinely seen by Cathie or Gennie for follow up from 2 years post diagnosis onwards, as outlined in the [The Breast Centre Surgical Follow-Up after Treatment for Early Breast Cancer](#) Flyer

Access to "same-day" imaging, previously offered whenever possible to country and/or elderly patients, is now extremely limited, due to the ever increasing numbers of patients and the progressive reduction in the capacity of the imaging service, caused by social distancing regulations and staff furloughing, and unfortunately, if same day imaging is undertaken, we cannot currently guarantee that the imaging results will be available at the time of the consultation. We therefore request that if at all possible, breast imaging be undertaken several days prior to your appointment, to ensure that the result is available at the time of your consultation.

The standard period of specialist surgical follow up after treatment for early breast cancer is 5 years, and patients are offered discharge from The Breast Centre to their general practitioners at that time. Some patients elect to continue their annual follow up through The Breast Centre after 5 years post diagnosis, however as our priority for imaging availability has to be patients with a new breast cancer diagnosis and those within the 5 year window, we are no longer able to offer same day imaging to patients who are more than 5 years post diagnosis.