

Blog 10th May 2020 Mothers Day

I spent it with my mokopuna. Hugs, making marmalade, TeM roaring back at his Tyanosaurus Rex toy, more marmalade.....This pandemic has reminded us to focus on the important things like family, friends and community. There was an avalanche of orange marmalade by the end of the weekend, so Arena and TeM went for a walk and dropped jars off to the neighbours, 3 up and 2 down, leaving it prominently displayed on top of their letter boxes, and texting them the news. Two more cases today! One from a new arrival, another late straggler coming home from overseas, but another, a household contact of a case in the St Margarets cluster in West Auckland. This reminds us that it will be a while until we shut down all the clusters so we all need to be vigilant still, especially if we move to level 2 at the end of the week.

South Korea has shown us this weekend how just one man in the presymptom phase of Covid, but already infectious, can start it all off again. They have just come out of Lockdown. By visiting three bars in Seoul in one night, he has infected 40 people already but potentially had contact with 1500! That cluster will take a long time to shut down, if they can shut it down, without the help of Lockdown to burn out undetected and asymptomatic cases. We don't need a similar case in New Zealand to trigger it all again. Lockdown has been too hard for too many people to have to go through it another time.

I keep being asked about masks. To be honest I have been really bothered to see some people wearing masks and fiddling with them all the time. Hands off faces: have they forgotten?

The respirator type masks, ones which are true covid masks, are definitely better left to the healthcare people, doctors and nurses who use them a lot, as they are hard to wear. They are hot, fog up glasses, and take a lot of getting used breathing through them properly as our nurses will tell anyone who asks, as they have been the ones having the post patient contact as the vaccinate against Influenza, and triage people coming in the doors. Even the disposable type are hard enough to wear. Like all doctors working in the hospital and especially in theatre I used to use them all the time, but find its only now after five weeks of Lockdown practice that I am getting back to getting used to them. And using them better. Now I manage to fit them once across the nose as I put them on, tuck them under the chin and avoid touching them until I take them off carefully using the ear hooks and not touching the main part of the mask. I have got so used to having them on I often forget they are there and lift a cup of tea up to drink before I remember!

Homemade masks will work to a degree. They protect the wearer far less than you think, but do reduce your ability to infect others by filtering out the big moisture drops loaded with virus particles. The fine particles can go straight through them and be breathed in. Washing hands properly, frequently and using hand sanitiser is much more effective and keeping 2m apart is also more important than masks. Homemade masks are more effective if a proper filter is inserted in a pocket between the layers, but then it becomes far less comfortable to wear, and much harder to breathe through. Those filters are purchased from Medical Supplies companies usually in packs of 50

or 100. They also should be washed after 4 hours use, disposable ones disposed of and reusable ones dropped in the washing machine and hands washed again immediately. Better still wash reusable ones and your hands together in soapy warm water in the sink. And then you can take the filter out wet and drop it in the rubbish bin more safely that way. It's the soap for 20 seconds that's important, not the water temperature.

So do you need to mask up? Yes, and no. Yes if under level 3 and 2 you can't maintain social distancing. That will be public transport, jobs like hairdressing etc. Then it is your best option as long as you learn to use the mask properly. No, if you keep touching it and your face and use it badly as it will then increase the risk of contracting Covid-19. No too if it makes you complacent about handwashing and social distancing.

Gloves are similar. Put on carefully they do protect your hands and minimise the drying effects of soaps, detergents and alcohol -but then they have to be removed carefully and dropped in a bin. Hand sanitiser can be used on gloves too remember.

If we move to level 2 this week at the surgery we will see more people than we have been, but we will still be doing a lot of telephone consultations. When our new ipads arrive we will start video consultations too for people who request them using doxyme.com. We will want people to ring in first and check with a nurse or doctor as a case of Covid 19 in our surgery will mean we all have to go home for 14 days quarantine. If you have a fever, headcold and chesty we are likely to see you in the car park to do a swab and send you home. And we will be gowned up from head to toe! Since our Takanini Testing station at Takanini Care is closed from Monday 11th May, we will be available for swab testing of all our patients. It is a free service and you don't need to go anywhere else to get a swab done. All GPs, not just so-called Designated Practices, will be available to do the swabs for their patients. We did not want to be a designated practice as we promised to look after our patients first, and so do not want to spend our time seeing casual patients. If Covid-19 has highlighted anything to me in the past 3 months, it's the importance of being registered with a General Practice, and in particular knowing the patient. It makes those telephone consultations so much more effective, and it's been lovely keeping in touch. It gives me great heart that our sort of old-fashioned general practice might survive the onslaught from Corporate medicine after all.

I have some wonderful news to finish off. Dr Cathy Latu is staying on with us. Those who have already met her I am sure will be as pleased as Dr Mick and I am. So next week I am hoping I can talk far less about Covid19- maybe very little at all if we start having many more zero days- and I will then get both Dr Cathy, and as promised last week our new nurse Shannon, to tell you more about themselves.

From us all at Tiakina Te Ora, be safe, be well.

