



COVID-19 – Frequently asked questions

What is a coronavirus and COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses known to cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). This new coronavirus originated in Hubei Province, China and the disease caused by the virus is named COVID-19.

How is this coronavirus spread?

COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other colds and flus and include:

- fever
- sore throat
- cough
- tiredness
- difficulty breathing.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying these symptoms are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not coronavirus.

What do I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms within 14 days of arriving in Australia or within 14 days of last contact with a confirmed case, you should arrange to see your doctor for urgent assessment.

You should telephone the health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your travel history or that you have been in contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus. You must remain isolated either in your home, hotel or a health care setting until public health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

Your doctor will tell you if you should be tested. They will arrange for the test.

You will only be tested if your doctor decides you meet the criteria:

- You have returned from overseas in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever.
- You have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever.
- You have severe community-acquired pneumonia and there is no clear cause.

- You are a healthcare worker who works directly with patients and you have a respiratory illness and a fever

If you meet any of these criteria, your doctor can request you are tested for COVID-19. It is important to remember that many people with symptoms similar to COVID-19 will not have the virus. Only suspected cases are tested to ensure our labs are able to cope with the demand. There is no need to test people who feel well and do not meet the criteria above.

Who needs to isolate?

All people who arrive in Australia from midnight 15 March 2020, or think they may have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus, are required to self-isolate for 14 days.

Someone I live with is getting tested for COVID-19. Should I self-isolate and get tested as well?

If a household member is a suspected case, you may need to be isolated. This will be determined by your public health unit on a case-by-case basis. Your public health unit will contact you if you need to isolate. For more information, read our fact sheet on [home isolation](#).

What does isolate in your home mean?

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you must stay at home to prevent it spreading to other people. You might also be asked to stay at home if you may have been exposed to the virus.

Staying at home means you:

- do not go to public places such as work, school, shopping centres, childcare or university
- ask someone to get food and other necessities for you and leave them at your front door
- do not let visitors in — only people who usually live with you should be in your home

You do not need to wear a mask in your home. If you need to go out to seek medical attention, wear a surgical mask (if you have one) to protect others.

You should stay in touch by phone and on-line with your family and friends. For more information, read our fact sheet on [home isolation](#).

What is social distancing?

Social distancing is one way to help slow the spread of viruses such as COVID-19. Social distancing includes staying at home when you are unwell, avoiding large public gatherings if they're not essential, keeping a distance of 1.5 metres between you and other people whenever possible and minimising physical contact such as shaking hands, especially with people at higher risk of developing serious symptoms, such as older people and people with existing health conditions.

There's no need to change your daily routine, but taking these social distancing precautions can help protect the people in our community who are most at risk.

Who is most at risk of a serious illness?

Some people who are infected may not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may become very ill, very quickly. From previous experience with other coronaviruses, the people at most risk of serious infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems (e.g. cancer)
- elderly people
- aboriginal and torres strait islander people, as they have higher rates of chronic illness
- people with chronic medical conditions
- people in group residential settings
- people in detention facilities
- very young children and babies.*

*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.

How is the virus treated?

There is no specific treatment for coronaviruses. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Most of the symptoms can be treated with supportive medical care.

How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene and keeping your distance from others when you are sick is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- if unwell, avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people)
- exercise personal responsibility for social distancing measures.

Can I visit family and friends in aged care facilities?

The outbreak of any virus in aged care facilities can cause significant problems. However COVID-19 is a health risk for older people. In order to protect older people, restrictions apply. Do not visit aged care facilities if you have:

- returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- have a fever or symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, shortness of breath)

From 1 May you must have your influenza vaccination in order to visit an aged care facility.

The Government has also announced that aged care facilities must take extra precautions when it comes to visits, including:

- ensuring visits are kept short
- ensuring visits are kept to a maximum of two visitors, including doctors, at a time
- ensuring that visits are in a resident's room, outdoors, or in a specific area designated by the facility and not in communal areas
- there be no large group visits or gatherings, including social activities or entertainment
- school groups of any size are not to visit

- children under the age of 16 are not permitted, except in special circumstances.

If visiting family and friends in residential aged care facilities is not possible, it's important to keep in touch via phone and video calls, send postcards, photos or artwork, or videos.

What are non-essential gatherings

Non-essential gatherings are suspended for an initial four weeks to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) and to give both businesses and people time to fully understand social distancing requirements.

The following facilities are restricted from opening from midday local time 23 March 2020:

- Pubs, registered and licensed clubs (excluding bottle shops attached to these venues), hotels (excluding accommodation).
- Gyms and indoor sporting venues.
- Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, and night clubs.
- Restaurants and cafes will be restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery.
- Religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals (in enclosed spaces and other than very small groups and where the 1 person per 4 square metre rule applies).

Isolated remote community hubs are not included in these restrictions.

Other facilities are not impacted, but could be considered under a later stage of restrictions, if necessary.

These measures also apply to outdoor spaces associated with the above venues.

Currently, Australia does not have widespread community transmission of COVID-19. To help slow the spread, the Australian Government has advised that non-essential outside gatherings should be limited to 500 people.

Non-essential meetings or conferences of critical workforces, such as health care professionals and emergency services, should also be limited. This advice does not include workplaces, schools, universities, shops, supermarkets, public transport and airports.

To protect vulnerable Australians, the Government has also advised reducing visitors to all residential aged care facilities and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

These precautions are most important for people over 60, particularly if they have a chronic condition.

What are the essential gatherings guidelines

Essential gatherings must continue to adhere to the following guidance and restrict the number of people present to 500 for outdoor gatherings and 100 for indoor gatherings. These restrictions are to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

What is an essential indoor gathering

An indoor gathering takes place within a single enclosed area (a single room or area).

Essential activities include:

- health care settings
- pharmacies
- food shopping
- schools

These essential indoor gatherings should apply social distancing and good hygiene practices:

- Being able to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres between people.
- Providing hand hygiene products and suitable rubbish bins, with frequent cleaning and waste disposal.

Special restrictions remain in place for [aged care facilities](#) to protect older Australians.

Public transport is essential and, at this stage, the 100 person limit does not apply. This will be reviewed regularly.

Always use appropriate social distancing and hygiene practices when travelling on public transport.

Non-essential travel is to be avoided.

What about public transport like planes, buses, trains, ride shares and taxis?

Non-essential travel is to be avoided.

Most public transport is considered to be essential. However the Government does recommend that employers offer flexible working arrangements to minimise the number of people catching public transport at any one time. Long distance services carry a higher risk of infection and should be reconsidered at this time.

The Spirit of Tasmania is considered an essential service and will still operate.

If possible, sit in the back seat of taxis and ride share vehicles.

Group transport of at-risk people, including older people should be avoided where possible.

My workplace has more than 100 people. Can I still go to work?

Yes, you can still go to work. The Government currently recommends that organised, non-essential gatherings be limited to a maximum of 100 people. This advice does not include workplaces, schools, universities, shops, supermarkets, public transport and airports. If you are unwell, you should stay home to avoid spreading germs to others.

Should I be taking my kids out of childcare or school?

No, at this stage the Government recommends continuing essential daily activities including school and childcare. If your child is unwell, you should keep them home to avoid spreading their germs to others.

So far, information from around the world indicates that children who develop COVID-19 have very mild symptoms and very little transmission appears to occur between children.

Singapore is currently providing a strong example of the benefits of keeping child care and schools operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools should ensure their hygiene practices are appropriate and that children are educated about and encouraged to practice social distancing wherever possible.

Should I wear a face mask?

You do not need to wear a mask if you are healthy. While the use of masks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like coronavirus.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of your state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.