



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.

Can I go outside?

All Australians are required to stay home unless it is absolutely necessary to go outside.

Australians are permitted to go outside for the essentials, such as:

- shopping for food
- exercising outdoors, avoiding contact with other people
- going out for medical needs
- providing care or support to another individual in a place other than your home
- going to work if you cannot work from home.

All international travel is banned. Domestic travel is to be avoided.

When out of your home it is even more important to practise good hand and cough/sneeze hygiene and social distancing.

You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues and wash your hands
- avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people)
- exercise personal responsibility for social distancing measures.

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 believe you have been exposed to, or have COVID-19, you should phone the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080) for advice.

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.

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, and why is it important?

Social distancing includes ways to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. It means less contacts between you and other people.

Social distancing is important because COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct 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, or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as doorknobs or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.
- So, the more space between you and others, the harder it is for the virus to spread.

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.

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 the limits on public gatherings?

Find out what limits apply to public gatherings to help stop the spread of COVID-19 by visiting [this page](#) on the Department of Health website.

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

Non-essential travel is to be avoided.

The Government recommends 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.

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.

What about working from Home?

All Australians are required to stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary to go outside.

Australians are encouraged to work from home where they can.

If you are sick, you must not attend your workplace. You must stay at home and away from others.

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

It is safe to send your child to school or childcare.

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.

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.