



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 leave home?

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

Australians are permitted to leave home 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 or study if you cannot do it from home.

Attending barbers and hairdressers is allowed, but the four square metre rule per person must be strictly observed and personal contact during the patron's visit should be minimised where possible.

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
- avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people)
- you must stay at home if you are unwell
- 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.

Generally you will be tested if you develop fever or respiratory symptoms and meet at least one the following criteria:

- you have returned from overseas in the past 14 days
- you have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days
- you travelled on a cruise ship (either passenger or crew) in the 14 days before developing symptoms
- you are a health care, aged care or residential care worker
- you have lived in an area where there is a higher risk of community transmission, as defined by the local public health unit

You should also be tested if you meet all of the following criteria:

- you are in hospital
- you have fever and serious respiratory symptoms
- there is no other clear cause of the symptoms

People in high-risk settings will be tested if there are 2 or more people with fever and respiratory symptoms in the setting.

High-risk settings include:

- aged and residential care facilities
- detention centres or correctional facilities
- boarding schools
- military bases (including navy ships) that have live-in accommodation
- rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Some states and territories may have more testing criteria based on their cases.

The Department of Health regularly reviews these criteria.

Who needs to isolate?

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have been in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, you need to isolate as directed by your state or territory health department. See [this page](#) on the Health website for more information.

If you have arrived in Australia prior to Saturday 28 March 2020, you must self-isolate at home for 14 days from the day of your arrival.

In addition, from 11:59pm on Saturday 28 March 2020, all travellers arriving in Australia via air or sea ports will be required to undergo 14 days isolation in the city of their arrival.

Accommodation will be provided for the quarantine period.

If their final destination is in a different state or territory, they will still be required to complete their quarantine in the state or territory where they arrive, before returning home.

States and territories will be responsible for enforcing these requirements, supported by the Australian Government, including the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Border Force where necessary.

Air and maritime crews will be required to continue to undertake the existing precautions they are following where they must self-isolate in their accommodation when they enter Australia.

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 page 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 page 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

In Australia, the people most at risk of getting the virus are:

- travellers who have recently been overseas
- those who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19
- people in correctional and detention facilities
- people in group residential settings

People who are, or are more likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they get the virus are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. See [this page](#) on the Department of Health [website](#) for more information
- People 70 years and older
- People with compromised immune systems (see this page).

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.

There is limited evidence at this time regarding the risk in pregnant women.

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. For more information, visit [this page](#) on the Health website.

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?

The medical advice remains that it is safe to send you child to school or childcare.

However, many states and territories have made the decision to move to pupil free schools and support online learning.

For information and resources for learning from home and the latest on school arrangements visit your state or territory Department of Education website.

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 that remain open for children of essential workers should ensure their hygiene practices are appropriate and that children are educated about and encouraged to practise social distancing wherever possible.

Should I wear a face mask?

You do not need to wear a mask if you are healthy. For more information on the use of surgical masks, visit [this page](#) on the Health website.

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.