What you need to know

We need to work together to help stop the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

To protect people most at risk and slow the rate of community transmission:

- Non-essential organised gatherings should be kept to fewer than 500 people
- Non-essential meetings or conferences of health care professionals and emergency services should be limited
- Reconsider if you need to visit residential aged care facilities and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- From midnight Sunday 15 March, all travellers coming into Australia will be required to self-isolate for 14 days.

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

People who have returned from anywhere overseas are required to self-isolate for 14 days. During this time, you should monitor your health closely. If you develop symptoms including a fever and cough, you should seek medical attention, remembering to call ahead.

People who have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus should also monitor their health and seek medical advice.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not coronavirus.

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 is named COVID-19.

How is this coronavirus spread?

Coronavirus 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.
- 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.

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 wash your hands.
- If unwell, avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people).
- Exercise personal responsibility for social distancing measures.

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 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 needs to isolate?

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

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.

For more information, visit www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources

What do I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms (fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness or shortness of breath) within 14 days of arriving in Australia, or within 14 days of last contact of 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 may have been in contact with a potential 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.

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 diagnosed chronic medical conditions
- very young children and babies*
- people in group residential settings
- people in detention facilities.

*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.

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.