

What is the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a recently identified strain of coronavirus in humans.

Coronaviruses form a large family of viruses that can cause the common cold and, in rare circumstances, more serious diseases like SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome).

This new virus used to be known as the 'novel coronavirus (2019-nCov)' and first appeared in Wuhan city in Hubei Province, China.

Cases of COVID-19 have also been identified in Australia and in other countries. These are generally linked to travel to mainland China or exposure to someone who has been in mainland China.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever
- flu-like symptoms, such as coughing or sneezing
- difficulty breathing, which may develop into pneumonia
- sore throat
- fatigue

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show after a person has been infected.

Currently, it seems the elderly, people with a chronic disease (such as diabetes, chronic lung disease, kidney failure or people who are immunocompromised) may be at a higher risk of developing a serious case of COVID-19

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

If you have severe difficulty breathing, call triple zero (000) immediately and tell the call handler and the paramedics on arrival about your recent travel history.

If you have recently travelled to mainland China, and have developed a fever or respiratory symptoms, use the healthdirect Symptom Checker to help you decide what to do next.

When you visit your doctor or the hospital emergency department, it is very important that you call **before** visiting to describe your symptoms and travel history.

You can also call the healthdirect helpline on 1800 022 222 to speak with a registered nurse.

Do I need to isolate myself?

In some situations, you must isolate yourself, even if you have no symptoms. These situations are:

- if you have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, you must isolate yourself at home for 14 days after you were exposed
- if you have travelled to Hubei Province within the past 14 days, you must isolate yourself until 14 days after leaving Hubei province
- if you have left, or transited through mainland China on or after 1 February 2020, you must isolate yourself until 14 days after leaving China

Please check with your local state or territory health department for any additional advice on self-isolating.

You may leave home to seek medical care if you develop symptoms, but please make sure that you call **before** visiting your doctor or hospital emergency department and that you let them know your travel history.

What does home isolation mean?

Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed as being infected with the virus should:

- stay home for 14 days except to get medical care; do not go to work, school, or visit public areas, and do not use public transportation or taxis
- call ahead **before** visiting the doctor to tell them that the person who is ill has, or may have been exposed to, the COVID-19 coronavirus, or they are being tested for it
- remain separated from other people in the home, stay in a different room and use a separate bathroom, if available
- restrict visitors who do not need to be in the home
- keep elderly people and those who have compromised immune systems or chronic health conditions away. This includes people with chronic heart, lung or kidney conditions, and diabetes
- make sure that shared spaces in the home have good air flow, such as an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting
- wear a surgical face mask if they need to be around other people (the doctor will arrange this). If they are unable to wear a surgical face mask then the people around them should wear a surgical face mask
- cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can, and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- wash their hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available and if the hands are not visibly dirty. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with other people. After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water
- seek prompt medical attention if the illness is worsening

What do I need to do if I am caring for someone who is isolated at home?

If you are caring for someone with symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed as being infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus you should:

- wear a disposable face mask, gown, and gloves (organised by your doctor) when you touch or have contact with the person's blood, body fluids and/or secretions, such as sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhoea
- throw out disposable face masks, gowns, and gloves after using them – do not reuse
- wash your hands immediately after removing your face mask, gown, and gloves
- clean all “high-touch” surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, every day.
- clean any surfaces that may have blood, body fluids or excretions on them
- wash laundry thoroughly

Can my child attend school or day care?

You must not send your child to school or day care and they should not engage with other students if:

- they have been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case – you must isolate them at home for 14 days after they were exposed
- they have returned from mainland China – you must isolate them at home for 14 days after leaving mainland China

Please check with your local state or territory health departments for any additional advice on attending school or day care.

How do I avoid becoming infected by the COVID-19 coronavirus?

The best way to avoid infection is to avoid contact with the virus. To do this:

- regularly wash your hands after touching hard surfaces or having contact with animals
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if you have not washed your hands
- do not have close contact with anyone who is showing signs of a respiratory illness
- avoid contact with wild or farm animals if travelling outside Australia
- monitor the advice for travellers (if you plan to travel) on the government Smartraveller website

Face masks are currently not recommended as a preventative measure for people who have not had any potential exposure to the COVID-19 coronavirus.

If you are experiencing symptoms and think you may have COVID-19, minimise the chances of it spreading by:

- isolating yourself at home for 14 days, leaving only to seek medical care

- washing your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and using hand sanitiser
- covering your mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing (cough or sneeze into your elbow or a disposable tissue)
- using only disposable tissues, not handkerchiefs, and disposing of them immediately
- avoiding travel on public transport or visiting public places

How is COVID-19 spread?

It is thought the COVID-19 coronavirus originated in animals at the live animal market in Wuhan city and spread to humans. Human-to-human transmission of the virus has been reported outside Australia.

The current cases in Australia have been linked to travel to mainland China or close contact with someone who has been infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus. Health authorities, both in Australia and globally, are closely monitoring whether or not the risk of catching COVID-19 from infected people who have not been to mainland China will change.

Currently, the virus is most likely to spread from person to person through:

- direct contact with a person while they are infectious
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who does not take appropriate precautions when coughing or sneezing
- touching contaminated objects or surfaces (such as door-knobs or tables) and then touching the mouth or face

What is close contact?

Close contact means:

- you have had face-to-face contact for at least 15 minutes with someone who has been infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus
- you have been in a closed space for at least 2 hours with someone who has been infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus

Contacts

Coronavirus Health Information Line

Call this line if you are seeking information on novel coronavirus. This line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Phone: 1800 020 080

Healthdirect hotline

Call this number to speak to a registered nurse about your health concerns. The hotline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Phone: 1800 022 222