



Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Information for Health Care and Residential Care Workers

An outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in late December 2019.

Can I go to work?

You are advised that you must isolate yourself at home if:

- You have left Hubei Province less than 14 days ago (until 14 days after you left Hubei)
- You have been identified as close contacts of proven cases of novel coronavirus (until 14 days after last contact with the confirmed case)
- You have left, or transited through, mainland China on or after 1 February 2020 (until 14 days after leaving China).

If you develop symptoms (listed below) within 14 days of returning from anywhere in mainland China or within 14 days of contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, you should arrange to see your usual doctor for urgent assessment. You should telephone the health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your recent travel history or close contact history. Your doctor will liaise with Public Health authorities to manage your care. You must remain isolated in your home or a healthcare setting until Public Health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Workers who are self-isolated due to one of the above situations should alert their employer to discuss alternative arrangements such as working from home. Some health and residential care workers provide a caring role outside an employment setting. Wherever possible you are advised to arrange alternative assistance for these patients / care recipients.

What does isolate in your home mean?

People who are isolated should not attend public places, in particular work, school, childcare, or public gatherings. Only people who usually live in your household should be in the home. Do not allow visitors into the home. There is no need to wear masks in the home. Where possible, get others such as friends or family, who are not required to be isolated, to get food or other necessities for you. If you must leave the home, such as to seek medical care, wear a surgical mask.

I am an employer – what should I tell my staff?

Health care, residential care and home service providers should brief all employees and contracted staff, including students and interns, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of 2019-nCoV to people in their care. You should inform staff who meet the above criteria that they should remain isolated in their home. Workers should advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period, particularly if they have been in the workplace.

What is this virus?

Coronaviruses can make humans and animals sick. Some coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold and others can cause more serious diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

The virus seen in mainland China is called 'novel' because it is new. It has not been detected before this outbreak. Most people currently infected live in, or have travelled to mainland China. There have been some cases of 2019-nCoV reported in other countries. It is likely that the virus originally came from an animal, and there is now evidence that it can spread from person-to-person.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct contact with a person whilst they are infectious;
- contact with droplets when a person with a confirmed infection coughs or sneezes; or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as doorknobs or tables) that were contaminated by droplets from secretions coughed or sneezed from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

For how long can a person spread the infection to other people?

The length of time that a person is infectious, that is, can spread the infection to others, is not yet known. However, there has been emerging evidence of asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic infection and pre-symptomatic transmission in at least one case cluster. It is therefore likely that a person can spread the infection from before the time they first develop symptoms until up to one day after symptoms stop.

Therefore, the Australian Government Department of Health is currently recommending an isolation period of 14 days for returned travellers from mainland China, and for contacts of confirmed cases.

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;
- elderly people;
- very young children and babies;
- people with diagnosed heart and lung conditions; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Healthcare and residential care workers should be mindful that people they work with are vulnerable to infection and vulnerable to serious illness if infected. It is essential that you avoid

contact with patients and aged care residents if you have recently travelled to mainland China or had contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus.

What if I have already returned to work but should have been isolated?

You should inform your employer as soon as possible that you have recently travelled to mainland China or had contact with a confirmed case, and isolate yourself for the remainder of the 14 day period.

If you go on to develop mild symptoms:

- immediately isolate yourself from others in your home;
- call your usual doctor or local hospital and tell them you may have novel coronavirus infection; and
- when you get to the doctor's clinic or hospital, tell them again that you may have novel coronavirus infection; and
- as soon as possible, please call your employer to notify them that you have developed symptoms and will be tested for the novel coronavirus.

If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing:

- call **000** and ask for an ambulance;
- tell the ambulance officers that you may have novel coronavirus infection; and
- as soon as possible, please call your employer to notify them that you have developed symptoms and will be tested for the novel coronavirus.

Your doctor will test you for 2019-nCoV and provide advice on your care. You will also be contacted by Public Health officers who will provide you with more information to coordinate with your employer as needed.

How can we help prevent the spread of the virus?

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence:

- wash your hands often with soap and water before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet;
- avoid contact with others; and
- cough and sneeze into your elbow.

Where can I get more information?

Visit the Australian Government Department of Health homepage at www.health.gov.au.

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080.

Contact your state or territory Public Health Authority:

- ACT call 02 5124 9213 during business hours or 02 9962 4155 after hours
- NSW call 1300 066 055
- NT call 08 8922 8044.
- Qld call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- SA call 1300 232 272
- Tas call 1800 671 738
- Vic call 1300 651 160
- WA call 08 9328 0553