



Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

What you need to know

Health authorities have identified coronavirus cases in Australia in January 2020. The virus originated in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and the majority of cases are there. The only clear evidence of person-to-person transmission is in the Hubei province.

Currently in Australia, people most at risk of contracting the virus are those who have been in Hubei Province recently, or have been in close contact with someone who is a confirmed case of coronavirus. If this applies to you, this fact sheet will let you know what to do.

What is this coronavirus?

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 originating in Hubei Province, China, is called 'novel' because it is new. It had not been detected before this outbreak.

How is the coronavirus spread?

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

- Direct close contact with a person whilst they are infectious;
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection coughs or sneezes; or
- Touching objects or surfaces (such as door knobs or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

Most infections are only transmitted by people when they have symptoms. These can include fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness and shortness of breath.

There is now some evidence that people could be contagious before showing symptoms. This means anyone who has been in Hubei Province recently or been in close contact with someone who is a confirmed case of coronavirus, must take the following additional precautions, even if they don't feel unwell.

Travellers from Hubei Province within 14 days

If you have travelled to Hubei Province, China within the past 14 days, you must isolate yourself in your home for 14 days after leaving Hubei Province.

Close contact of a confirmed case of Coronavirus

If you think you may have been a close contact of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus while you were in Hubei Province, you must isolate yourself in your home for 14 days after last contact with the confirmed case.

What does isolate in your home mean?

People who are recommended to be isolated should not attend public places, in particular work, school, childcare or university. Only people who usually live in the 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 if you have one.

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 returning from Hubei Province, or within 14 days of last contact of a confirmed case, 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 travel history or that you may have been in contact with a potential case of novel coronavirus. You must then remain isolated either in your home or a healthcare setting until Public Health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Travellers from mainland China and other countries

If you have travelled to mainland China in general but not Hubei Province, we do not currently recommend self-isolation. The development of cases outside of Hubei Province is being closely monitored and this advice will be updated if necessary.

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, such as people with cancer
- elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- very young children and babies, and
- people with diagnosed chronic medical conditions.

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.

How can we help prevent the spread of the virus?

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands often with soap and water before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet;
- avoid contact with others (including touching, kissing, hugging, and other intimate contact); and
- cough and sneeze into your elbow.

Should I wear a face mask?

Face masks are not recommended. A face mask will not protect you against becoming infected. While the use of face masks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, **face masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like novel coronavirus.**

Where can I get more information?

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

Call the Public Health Information Line on 1800 004 599.

Talk to your general doctor if you have concerns.