Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Frequently asked questions 14 March 2020

There is an ongoing investigation to understand more about the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

As this is a rapidly evolving investigation, for the latest information visit:
https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus

General information about COVID-19

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness in humans and animals. Human coronavirus illnesses are generally mild such as the common cold.

However, some coronaviruses can cause severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which was identified in 2002, and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), which was identified in 2012.

What is the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

This is a new coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. It is a new strain of coronaviruses that hasn't previously been identified in humans.
COVID-19 is closely related to SARS and in the same family of viruses as MERS.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms include shortness of breath or cough, with or without a fever. In some cases, the virus can cause severe pneumonia. From what we know now about COVID-19, the symptoms can start between 2 and 14 days from exposure to the virus.

Should I be tested if I don't have symptoms?

No. There is no reason to be tested for COVID-19 if you do not have symptoms.

Why won't I get tested if I don't have symptoms?

In the early stages of infection (before people have symptoms), it may not be possible to detect the virus. Testing when you do not have symptoms could give a false negative result.

How do I get medical clearance for work?

It is not possible to obtain a "medical clearance" for COVID-19 unless you are a confirmed case of COVID-19. In the early stages of infection (before people have symptoms), it may not be possible to detect the virus. Testing when you do not have symptoms could give a false negative result.

Can COVID-19 be transmitted from person to person?

Yes, COVID-19 can be spread from person to person. The virus is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or
- 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.

Most infections are only transmitted by people when they have symptoms. Spread of this virus from person to person is usually between close contacts. The definition of 'close contacts' includes those people who have been face to face with a person infected with the virus for at least 15 minutes or been in the same closed space for at least 2 hours with an infected person.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

If you are a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 **OR** have travelled overseas in the past 14 days **AND** have respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath or cough, with or without a fever:

In the metropolitan area, you can visit a COVID-19 Clinic for assessment. For locations please see our website.

In a regional area, please call your GP and advise them of your symptoms and travel history. They will be able to advise you on where to go to be assessed.

If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency dial 000.

Treatment

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 and, in most cases, symptoms will resolve on their own.

Is there a vaccine?

There are no available vaccines for COVID-19 at this time.

Are health workers at risk?

Health workers are recommended to apply infection prevention and control measures while seeing patients. The risk to health workers remains low.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

The current testing available for COVID-19 includes obtaining nose and throat swabs. These are then sent to the laboratory for testing.

What if I don't have Medicare cover?

Most travellers to WA will have travel insurance. To support the WA Health response to COVID-19, the Minister for Health has confirmed that those people who are not eligible for Medicare AND who present to WA Health facilities for assessment in relation to COVID-19 infection, will not be charged out of pocket expenses.

Self-Quarantine

What should I do if I come into contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 infection?

Your Public Health Unit will contact you if you are a close contact of someone who has been confirmed to have COVID-19. You will be asked to stay isolated for 14 days since you last had contact with the infected person, and to report any symptoms to the Public Health Unit.

If you develop respiratory illness symptoms while in self-quarantine you will need to contact your local Public Health Unit for advice. Let them know you are in self-quarantine due to suspected COVID-19 infection.

Australian Government fact sheets are available:

- [Information for a suspected case](#)
- [Information about home isolation for those who are well](#)
- [Information about home isolation for those who are unwell](#)

Are some people at higher risk than others?

Some people may be at higher risk of infection, such as people who have other illnesses that suppress the immune system or make them more vulnerable to respiratory disease. This includes people with lung disease or diabetes, those who have suppressed immune systems, and the elderly.

What does self-quarantine mean for me?

If you are required to self-quarantine, it means you must stay in your home, hotel room, or other accommodation even if you are perfectly well with no symptoms. The only time you should leave your home/accommodation is to seek medical attention. When you are in self-quarantine you cannot attend public places such as work, school, shopping centres or go on holidays.

If you are a confirmed case of COVID-19, you must also follow appropriate infection control measures such as:

- wearing a surgical mask (if you have one) or keeping a distance of more than 1.5 metre or arm's length from others when you are in the same room with them (irrespective of whether they are also in isolation or not),
- covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough,
- washing hands often and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, and
- ensuring you do not share household items with other people in your home.

Do I need to self-quarantine?

People need to self-quarantine in the following circumstances:

- If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you must isolate yourself for 14 days after the date of last contact with the confirmed case.
- If you have left, or transited through, mainland China or Iran in the last 14 days, you must isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of leaving mainland China or Iran.
- If you have left, or transited through, the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March, you must isolate yourself until 14 days after leaving the Republic of Korea.
- If you have left, or transited through, Italy on or after 11 March, you must isolate yourself until 14 days after leaving Italy.

If you are suspected of having COVID-19, you must isolate yourself until you have test results and have been advised you no longer need to isolate.

health.wa.gov.au

How can I protect myself and my family?

The best way to protect yourself and others is to practise good hygiene by:

- frequently washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or using an alcohol-based hand gel
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue or flexed elbow
- avoiding close contact with anyone who has a cold or flu-like symptoms.

Should I wear a face mask?

WA Health does not recommend the use of facemasks for the general public to prevent the risk of contracting COVID-19. There are further details in the Australian Government fact sheet Information on the use of surgical masks

I am caring for someone who has (or could have) COVID-19, how can I protect myself?

Anyone in the home with a respiratory illness should be cared for in a single room, where practicable. Isolating sick residents in single rooms reduces the risk of transmission to others.

Follow the below steps to reduce chances of spreading infections at home:

- frequently washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or using an alcohol-based hand gel
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue or flexed elbow
- avoiding close contact with anyone who has a cold or flu-like symptoms.

If it is not possible to keep the potentially infected person in a room by themselves, try to follow these principles to reduce chances of disease spread:

- as a priority, place people with excessive cough and phlegm in single rooms
- if there is more than one person with the same symptoms, they can be placed together in the same room
- importantly, ensure that people sharing a room are physically separated (more than 1 metre or arm's length) from each other.

This information is summarised in the 'Home isolation guidance when unwell' fact sheet:

Can employees return to work if their family members are in self-quarantine?

The employee can to go to work. However, if the family member becomes symptomatic and requires testing during the 14 days of self-quarantine, then the employee may need to self-quarantine until the results of the family member's COVID-19 test is known.

If the family member's test result is positive for COVID-19 the employee will be contacted by their Public Health Unit if they need to self-quarantine.

More information is in the 'Information for employers' fact sheet:

Travel

What should I do if I have been to mainland China, Iran, South Korea or Italy?

Travellers from mainland China, Iran, the Republic of Korea and Italy may need to self-quarantine. Please see the advice under "Self-Quarantine" above to determine if this applies to your travel situation.

More information can be found on the Home Isolation fact sheet and at www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers.

health.wa.gov.au

I have a holiday or work trip planned, what should I do?

The current advice (at 14 March 2020) to all Australians (regardless of age, health or destination) is to **reconsider any non-essential overseas travel at this time**. For up to date information please go to the Australian Government's [Smartraveller](#) website.

Other information

Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick?

There is no current evidence that pets are at risk from a potentially infected case. Until more is known about COVID-19, avoid contact with pets if you have been to China or Iran in the past 14 days and get sick. While you are sick, wear a facemask if you must care for or be around pets or other animals.

Is it safe to be around cruise ships that dock in WA ports?

The commonwealth and state governments along with the Cruise Line Industry Association, have put in place a series of extra border measures, including health screening and isolation measures, to minimise the risk to Western Australians.