FACT SHEET
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

12/05/2020

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus. Symptoms include fever, coughing, a sore throat and shortness of breath. The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene can help prevent infection. Find out who is at risk and what you should do if you think you have COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases.

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new type of coronavirus. It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild illness to severe pneumonia.
Some people will recover quickly and easily, and others may get sick very quickly.

The symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever
- coughing
- sore throat
- shortness of breath

If you are concerned you may have COVID-19:

- access the symptom checker on the healthdirect website
- seek medical advice by contacting the National Coronavirus Helpline on **1800 020 080.** This information line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you are a non-English speaker, you can use the Translating and Interpreting Service by calling **131 450**
- call ahead of time to book an appointment with your doctor or hospital
- find out about testing by contacting your local state or territory health department

How does it spread?

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 48 hours before they had symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face

Because COVID-19 is a new disease, there is no immunity to it in our community. This means that it can spread widely and quickly.

What is the COVIDSafe app for?

The COVIDSafe app is part the Australian Government's work to slow the spread of COVID-19. Having confidence we can find and contain outbreaks quickly will mean governments can ease restrictions while still keeping Australians safe. The COVIDSafe app is the only contact tracing app approved by the Australian Government.

The new COVIDSafe app is completely voluntary. Downloading the app is something you can do to protect you, your family and friends and save the lives of other Australians. The more Australians connect to the COVIDSafe app, the quicker state and territory health officials can find the virus and contact people who may have been exposed to COVID-19.

The COVIDSafe app speeds up the current manual process of finding people who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. This means you'll be contacted more quickly if you are at risk. This reduces the chances of you passing on the virus to your family, friends and other people in the community.

State and territory health officials can only access app information if someone tests positive and agrees to the information in their phone being uploaded. The health officials can only use the app information to help alert those who may need to quarantine or get tested.

How does the COVIDSafe app work?

When you download the app you provide your name, mobile number, and postcode and select your age range. You will receive a confirmation SMS text message to complete installation. The system then creates a unique encrypted reference code just for you.

The COVIDSafe app recognises other devices with the app installed and Bluetooth enabled. When the app recognises another user, it notes the date, time, distance and duration of the contact and the other user's reference code. The COVIDSafe app does not collect your location.

To be effective, you should have the COVIDSafe app running as you go about your daily business and come into contact with people. Users will receive daily notifications to ensure the COVIDSafe app is running.

The information is encrypted and that encrypted identifier is stored securely on your phone. Not even you can access it. The contact information stored in people's mobiles is deleted on a 21-day rolling cycle. This period takes into account the COVID-19 incubation period and the time it takes to get tested.

Who is most at risk from COVID-19?

In Australia, the people most at risk of catching the virus are:

- travellers who have recently been overseas
- people who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19
- people in correctional and detention facilities
- people in group residential settings

People who are, or are more likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they catch the virus are:

- people 70 years and older
- people 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with chronic medical conditions
- people with compromised immune systems

There has so far been a low rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases among children, relative to the broader population.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has advised there are no increased risks to children by sending them to school.

There is limited evidence at this time regarding the risk in pregnant women.

Refer to the Department of Health website for advice for people at risk.

How to protect yourself and others from COVID-19

Everyone has a part to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. It is important to do the following things to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect those who are most at risk.

Practise physical distancing (also called social distancing) and good hygiene. This means:

- keeping 1.5 meters away from others
- staying at home if you have cold or flu-like symptoms
- avoiding physical greetings such as handshakes, hugs and kisses
- using tap and go instead of cash where possible
- cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- put used tissues straight into the bin and wash your hands
- wash your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- use alcohol-based hand sanitisers
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces such as benchtops, desks and doorknobs
- clean and disinfect frequently used objects such as mobile phones, keys, wallets and work passes
- increase the amount of fresh air available by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning

Follow advice on public gatherings from your state or territory authorities at all times.

Moving towards a COVIDSafe Australia

Australia has successfully 'flattened the curve' and the number of new COVID-19 cases across the country at the moment is very low. We can now begin to take careful steps to ease some of the restrictions that have helped us suppress the spread of this virus.

The Australian Government has released a 3-step plan which provides a pathway for states and territories to move toward COVIDSafe communities. States and territories will move between the steps on the pathway at different times, in line with their public health situation and local conditions.

You can keep up to date with the changing restrictions in your state and territory by visiting their COVID-19 websites. However, throughout all steps, it is essential for people to maintain physical distancing and good hygiene, to stay at home if you are sick and get tested if you have any COVID-19 symptoms.

How do I seek medical attention?

It's important you continue to keep your normal medical appointments – particularly if you have chronic or existing conditions that need medical care.

If you are sick and think you have symptoms of COVID-19, it is important to seek medical advice. If you want to talk to someone about your symptoms, call the

National Coronavirus Helpline for advice on **1800 020 080**. This information line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you are a non-English speaker, you can use the Translating and Interpreting Service by calling **131 450.**

To seek medical help from a doctor or hospital, call ahead of time to let them know you are coming in. You will be asked to take precautions when you attend for treatment. Follow the instructions you are given.

If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness, wear a mask to protect others when you are seeking medical attention. If you don't have one, let your healthcare provider know as they may be able to supply you with one.

Stay at least 1.5 metres away from other people at all times. Cover your coughs or sneezes with your elbow.

Tell the doctor about:

- your symptoms
- any travel history
- any recent contact you have had with someone who has COVID-19

GP-led respiratory clinics

You may also be able to attend a GP-led respiratory clinic. There are respiratory clinics in each state and territory. For more information on clinics in your area, visit: https://www.health.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/local-state-and-territory-health-departments

Telehealth and home delivery of medicines

Doctors, nurses and mental health professionals are able to deliver bulk-billed services via telehealth until 30 September 2020 via phone or video conferencing.

Anyone with a Medicare card is eligible for telehealth services. Your doctor can also give you a prescription via a telehealth consultation.

Your doctor will create a paper prescription during your telehealth consultation. They can then create a clear copy of the entire prescription (a digital image such as a photo or pdf) to send to your preferred pharmacy via email, text or fax for delivery of your medicine to your home. If you prefer, your doctor can mail the paper prescription to you.

Find out more by visiting: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-national-health-plan-prescriptions-via-telehealth-a-guide-for-patients

Support for mental health

The coronavirus is changing the way we live and spend time with those we love. The pandemic will be with us for many months to come, and it is important that we remember to take care of our mental health as well as our physical health.

Stay connected to your friends, family, and community on the phone or internet.

Remember that it's okay not to be okay. If you are feeling stressed, sad, tired, anxious or angry, know that this is normal and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Visit the www.headtohealth.gov.au for:

- links to mental health online and phone support
- resources and services that can help if you're experiencing mental health concerns or trying to support someone else

How do I get tested for COVID-19?

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should present themselves for testing. The symptoms for COVID-19 are fever, cough and sore throat. It is important to get tested even if you only have mild symptoms.

Getting tested for COVID-19 helps identify as many cases as possible so they can be isolated and their contacts traced to prevent spread of the virus in the community.

This will assist in the public health effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 and where to prioritise and direct healthcare resources.

States and territories may have their own testing criteria, so please check with your local health departments.

Waiting for test results

It may take a few days for test results to come back.

If you have serious symptoms you may be kept in hospital and isolated from other patients to prevent the virus spreading.

If your doctor says you are well enough to go home while you wait for your test results, you should:

- isolate at home
- protect yourself and others by practising good hygiene and physical distancing

How is COVID-19 treated?

There is currently no treatment or vaccine for COVID-19. Medical care can treat most of the symptoms. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections and do not work on viruses.

Some reports suggest certain drugs, including hydroxychloroquine, can be used to treat COVID-19. No drugs have been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for treating COVID-19.

Learn more about hydroxychloroquine by visiting the TGA website: https://www.tga.gov.au/alert/new-restrictions-prescribing-hydroxychloroquine-covid-19

More information

Visit www.health.gov.au

Find the answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19.

Visit our COVID-19 English COVID-19 resources and translated COVID-19 resources

For what the Australian Government is protect Australians against COVID-19, go to www.australia.gov.au

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