



Fact sheet:

What you need to know about COVID-19

17/09/2020

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
- respiratory symptoms
- coughing
- sore throat
- shortness of breath

Other symptoms can include runny nose, headache, muscle or joint pains, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, loss of sense of smell, altered sense of taste, loss of appetite and fatigue.

How it spreads

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.

How do I get tested for COVID-19?

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested. It is important to get tested even if you only have mild symptoms.

If you are concerned you may have COVID-19 you can:

- check you symptoms using the healthdirect symptom checker or call the National Coronavirus Helpline for advice on 1800 020 080. If you are a non-English speaker, you can use the Translating and Interpreting Service by calling 131 450.
- go to a free COVID-19 respiratory clinic (testing clinic)
- contact your doctor by phone and they will arrange the test, this may attract a fee

COVID-19 respiratory clinics are dedicated health centres located around the country, focusing on testing people with symptoms of respiratory infection.

Find the [COVID-19 respiratory clinic nearest to you](#).

Waiting for test results

It may take a few days for test results to come back. While you are waiting for your test results you must follow the directions from public health authorities and the medical professionals who tested you.

If you get tested because you have symptoms you need to go straight home and stay there. You need to do this until you either have a negative test result or your symptoms have gone – whichever is longer.

You may be in quarantine because you are a returned traveller or close contact of a person with COVID-19. If you get tested for any reason when you are in quarantine you must continue to stay in quarantine until the end of the quarantine period (14 days). You must do this even if you have no symptoms and your test is negative.

If your test result is positive you need to isolate away from other people in your home, hospital or other accommodation as instructed by your doctor and public health authority.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There is currently no specific treatment or approved vaccine that cures or prevents COVID-19. There are some treatments that can help people recover from severe COVID-19. Research in Australia and around the world is underway to develop potential vaccines and treatments.

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 aged 70 years and older
- people whose immune systems are compromised due to certain medical conditions or treatments
- people with chronic medical conditions such as:
 - heart disease
 - lung disease
 - kidney failure
 - diabetes
 - severe obesity
 - liver disease

This is not a complete list of the chronic medical conditions that may increase risk. If you have any medical conditions it is recommended you discuss your individual risk and what you can do to protect yourself with your treating doctor.

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

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

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.

- keep 1.5 metres away from others
- avoid physical greetings such as handshakes, hugs and kisses
- stay at home if you have cold or flu-like symptoms and get tested even if your symptoms are mild
- 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.
- download the COVIDSafe app

Follow advice on public gatherings from your [state or territory authorities](#) at all times.

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

More information and contacts

[Australian Government Department of Health website](#)

[English COVID-19 resources](#)

[Translated COVID-19 resources](#)

[Australian Government website](#)

[Healthdirect symptom checker](#)

Find the [closest COVID-19 testing clinic near you](#) (healthdirect)

[Head to Health website](#) for support with mental health and wellbeing

National Coronavirus Helpline: 1800 020 080. This information line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Translating and Interpreting Service: 131 450. For translation and interpretation if you are a non-English speaker.