



# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Frequently asked questions

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 fever, sore throat, cough and/or shortness of breath, like the symptoms of the common cold. In severe cases, the virus can cause pneumonia with severe acute respiratory distress. From what we know now about COVID-19, the symptoms can occur between 2 and 14 days from exposure to the virus.

#### **Can COVID-19 be transmitted from person to person?**

Yes, COVID-19 can be spread from person to person. This can happen when a person comes into contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person, for example through coughing or sneezing.

Spread of this coronavirus from person to person is usually between close contacts. Close contacts are 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 have travelled or transited through China or Iran in the past 14 days AND have respiratory symptoms such as a sore throat, cough, shortness of breath or fever, please call your GP or call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080 and advise them of your symptoms and travel history. If you are attending a GP or require urgent medical assistance at an emergency department, ring ahead and tell them that you have been to China or Iran and are unwell. This will prevent other people at the health service potentially being exposed. 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. The laboratory will also test for other common respiratory viruses (such as influenza).

### 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.

## Protecting yourself and others

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

If you have been in contact with someone in the previous 14 days who has since been confirmed to have COVID-19, you must contact your GP or public health unit immediately. You may also be contacted by public health unit staff. 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.

Australian Government fact sheets are available:

Information for a suspected case: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-information-for-people-with-a-suspected-case-yi-si-bing-li-huan-zhe-xu-zhi>

Information for about home isolation for those who are:

- Well: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-information-about-home-isolation-for-those-who-are-well>
- Unwell: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-information-about-home-isolation-when-unwell-suspected-or-confirmed-cases>

### Are some people at higher risk than others?

People who live in, or have recently travelled to, a country or region that is at higher risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g. mainland China, Iran, the Republic of Korea or Italy) or had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. 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.

## 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':

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-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:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/novel-coronavirus-COVID-19-information-about-home-isolation-when-unwell-suspected-or-confirmed-cases>

## I work in a residential care facility, how can I protect myself when I care for residents?

Once isolation measures are in place, to further reduce the risk of transmission, it is preferable to allocate specific staff to the care of residents isolated in rooms. These staff members should not move between their section and other areas of the facility, or care for other residents. Staff members should self-monitor for signs and symptoms of respiratory illness and self-exclude from work if unwell.

Staff should work only if they are well. If there is confirmed COVID-19 in a facility, staff should wear a mask when at work. Staff who have been working in an affected area should not be moved to other parts of the facility.

# Travel

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

There are travel restrictions for travellers from mainland China, Iran and Republic of Korea.

- If you have left, or transited through mainland **China** in the last 14 days, you must isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of leaving mainland China.
- If you have left, or transited through **Iran** on or after 1 March, you must isolate yourself until 14 days after leaving 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.

People arriving in Australia from Italy must present for health screening at the border as directed. Unless instructed to do so, people arriving from Italy do not need to self-quarantine.

If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you must self-quarantine for 14 days after the date of last contact with the confirmed case.

More information can be found on the [Home Isolation](#) fact sheet and at [www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers).

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

Travel advisories are under constant and close review in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer and the network of overseas embassies and consulates.

In most countries, advice to Australians is to 'exercise normal safety precautions'. For the coronavirus, this means taking sensible measures to minimise your risk of exposure such as practising good hand hygiene. It does not mean reconsidering or cancelling your travel plans to these countries.

Travel information is constantly changing. For up to date information please go to <https://smartraveller.gov.au>. Advice from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) travel advice levels related to COVID-19 current at 6 March 2020:

- **China:** 'do not travel';
- **Iran:** 'do not travel';
- **The Republic of Korea:** 'reconsider the need to travel'. It is also advised that travellers 'do not travel' to Daegu in South Korea;
- **Japan, Mongolia and Italy:** 'exercise a high degree of caution'. It is also advised that travellers 'reconsider the need to travel' to 10 towns in Lombardy and one in Veneto.

## If I am returning to Australia from mainland China, Iran, the Republic of Korea, or Italy how do the travel restrictions apply to me?

Australian citizens, permanent residents, or select exempt family members who are returning to Australia after having been in (including transit) mainland China or Iran (in the past 14 days) or the Republic of Korea since the 5 March 2020 will be subject to advanced border control measures and must self-quarantine.

If you are arriving in Australia from Italy, you must present for health screening at the border as directed. Unless you are instructed to, you do not need to self-quarantine at home.

Border Force has more information on their website. Non-Australian citizens will be denied entry if their itinerary included transiting through mainland China or Iran during the last 14 days or the Republic of Korea (since the 5 March 2020).

## Is it safe to fly?

The COVID-19 situation is evolving. For the latest information on travel to all countries visit the Australian Government's Smartraveller website (<https://smartraveller.gov.au>).

[health.wa.gov.au](http://health.wa.gov.au)

## Going back to school or work

### Can children go to school or day care after returning from mainland China, Iran, the Republic of Korea or Italy?

Children returning from (including transiting through) mainland China or Iran must stay at home until 14 days after leaving mainland China or Iran. Children who have been in the Republic of Korea on or after the 5 March 2020 must self-quarantine for 14 days after leaving the Republic of Korea. Children returning from Italy will undergo extra screening at the borders when they arrive in Australia and do not need to self-quarantine unless they are advised to do so by border control.

### Can employees, including health care workers, return to work if their family members are in self-quarantine?

It is fine for the employee, (including healthcare workers), to go to work and to live with their family members who are in self-quarantine. However, if the family member becomes symptomatic (fever, sore throat, cough and/or shortness of breath) during the 14 days of self-quarantine, then the employee needs to self-isolate 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, then the employee needs to self-isolate for 14 days from the date when the family member became unwell and monitor for symptoms.

More information is in the ['Information for employers'](#) fact sheet:

### Do I need a medical certificate before returning to work?

If you have been in self-quarantine for the required 14 days and are well, you do not need a medical certificate before returning to work.

### A student in my class/my child's class is well but returned from mainland China or Iran within the last 14 days and should be in self-quarantine. Am I/is my child at risk?

The risk of infection with COVID-19 for other students and staff at the school is very low. COVID-19 is spread from person to person through close contact with an infected person or through contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze.

There is no requirement for any other students or staff at the school to be isolated because of being in contact with the student.

### Do I need a medical certificate before returning to work?

If you have been on home isolation for the required 14 days and are well, you do not need a medical certificate before returning to work.

## 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 WA Department of Health is confident the arrival of cruise ships into Western Australian ports present minimal risk to the health of Western Australians. There are well-established processes in place to ensure that serious infectious diseases, including COVID-19, are identified.

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.