CORONAVIRUS
FACT SHEET

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus.

Symptoms include fever, coughing, sore throat and shortness of breath. The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene can 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 the disease caused by a new coronavirus.

It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China. Other coronaviruses include Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Symptoms

Symptoms can range from mild illness to pneumonia. Some people will recover easily, and others may get very sick very quickly. People with coronavirus may experience:

- fever flu-like symptoms such as coughing,
- sore throat and fatigue,
- shortness of breath.

If you think you have COVID-19 If you are sick and think you have symptoms of COVID-19, seek medical attention.

If you want to talk to someone about your symptoms first, call the Coronavirus Health Information Line for advice.

Coronavirus Health Information Line

Call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080 if you are seeking information on coronavirus (COVID-19).

The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing, call 000 for urgent medical help.

How to seek medical attention

To seek medical help from a doctor or hospital, call ahead of time to book an appointment.

You will be asked to take precautions when you attend for treatment. Follow the instructions you are given.

If you have a mask, wear it to protect others. Stay at least 1.5 metres away from other people. Cover your coughs or sneezes with your elbow.

Tell the doctor about:your symptomsany travel historyany recent contact with someone who has COVID-19

Getting tested

Your doctor will tell you if you should be tested. They will arrange for the test.

You will only be tested if your doctor decides you meet the criteria:

- You have returned from overseas in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever;
- You have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever;
- You have severe community-acquired pneumonia and there is no clear cause; and
- You are a healthcare worker who works directly with patients and you have a respiratory illness and a fever.

There is a global shortage of the test kits that pathologists use to diagnose COVID-19. This is why health authorities are doing targeted testing instead of widespread testing.

After testing It may take a few days for the test results to come back. If you have serious symptoms you will 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:

- self-quarantine at home and do not attend work or school;
- wash your hands often with soap and watercough and sneeze into your elbow;
- avoid cooking for or caring for other members of your household; and
- wear the mask your doctor gives you if you cannot avoid close contact with other people.

For questions about testing or patient welfare, call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080.

Treatment

There is no treatment for COVID-19, but medical care can treat most of the symptoms. Antibiotics do not work on viruses.

If you need to self-isolate.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you must stay at home to prevent it spreading to other people. You might also be asked to stay at home if you may have been exposed to the virus.

Staying at home means you:

- do not go to public places such as work, school, shopping centres, childcare or university;
- ask someone to get food and other necessities for you and leave them at your front door; and
- do not let visitors in — only people who usually live with you should be in your home.

You do not need to wear a mask in your home. If you need to go out to seek medical attention, wear a surgical mask (if you have one) to protect others. You should stay in touch by phone and on-line with your family and friends.

Who is most at risk

In Australia, the people most at risk of getting the virus are those who have:

- recently been in in a high risk country or region (mainland China, Iran, Italy or Korea); or
- been in close contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19

Based on what we know about coronaviruses, those most at risk of serious infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer);
- elderly people;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as they have higher rates of chronic illness);
- people with chronic medical conditionspeople in group residential settings; and
- people in detention facilities.

To help protect people most at risk, the Federal Government has recommended limits on public gatherings and visits to vulnerable groups.

How it spreads

The virus can spread from person to person through:

• close contact with an infectious person (including in the 24 hours before they started showing symptoms);
• contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze; and
• touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

COVID-19 is a new disease, so there is no existing immunity in our community. This means that COVID-19 could spread widely and quickly.

To help reduce the spread and protect those who are most at risk, it is important that you take the recommended steps to protect yourself and others.

Protect yourself and others

To prevent the spread of viruses, practise good hygiene and social distancing.

Good hygiene

Everyone must practise good hygiene to protect against infection and prevent the virus spreading.

Good hygiene includes:

- covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue;
- disposing of tissues properly;
- washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet;
- using alcohol-based hand sanitisers; and
- cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.

if you are sick, avoiding contact with others and staying more than 1.5 metres away from people

If you have a confirmed case, you need to self-quarantine to prevent it spreading to other people.

Social distancing

One way to slow the spread of viruses is social distancing. For example:

- staying at home when you are unwell;
- avoiding large public gatherings if they're not essential;
- keeping a distance of 1.5 metres between you and other people whenever possible; and
- minimising physical contact, especially with people at higher risk such as older people and people with existing health conditions

Surgical masks

Surgical masks in the community are only helpful in preventing people who have coronavirus disease from spreading it to others.

If you are well, you do not need to wear a surgical mask. There is little evidence that widespread use of surgical masks in healthy people prevents transmission in public.

Vaccination

There is no vaccine for COVID-19, but there is one for the flu. You should get your flu shot when it's available. Getting the flu and COVID-19 at the same time can make you very ill.

Scientists from around the world are working on developing a vaccine. The World Health Organisation believes this may be available within 18 months.

Support

Support is available if you are concerned about COVID-19 or are distressed because you are in self-quarantine or sick.

You can go to the Head for Health website (https://headtohealth.gov.au) for:

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

This information has been sourced from the Federal Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) website - https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#symptoms