

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

For Victorians

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Last updated: 1 February 2020.

Situation

The Department of Health and Human Services is working closely with the Victorian health sector, Commonwealth and international agencies to respond appropriately to the outbreak of a novel coronavirus in Hubei Province, including Wuhan City, in China.

This is a rapidly changing situation. Please go to: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/novelcoronavirus> for updates.

There have been confirmed cases in Victoria. If you think you may have novel coronavirus, please call the dedicated hotline 1800 675 389. This number is serviced by Nurse-on-Call. Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies.

What is novel coronavirus?

The novel coronavirus identified in this outbreak has never before been identified in people. However, coronaviruses are not new and cause infections like the common cold, and rarer infections like Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). The term coronavirus refers to a big group of viruses that cause a wide range of illness.

Who is most at risk of infection with this novel coronavirus?

Anyone who has travelled to mainland China or is a close or casual contact of a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is at risk of infection. This includes anyone who visited Hubei Province in the past 14 days. Anyone who is unwell and presents with a letter, email or other correspondence from a state or territory public health or communicable disease unit informing them they are a contact should be treated as a suspected case.

Anyone who attended the House of Delight restaurant in Glen Waverley between 1730 and 1900 on 26 January 2020, or who was on Tiger Airways flight TT566 From Melbourne to Gold Coast on 27 January 2020 should contact the department on 1300 651 160.

What are the symptoms of the novel coronavirus?

- The virus appears to cause a range of symptoms, from a mild respiratory infection with a fever, to a significant respiratory infection (pneumonia).
- People at greatest risk are considered to be people who have been in Hubei Province, China, and people who have been in mainland China from 1 February 2020 or are a close contact of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus infection.
- A person in any of these groups is advised to self-isolate until 14 days after the last time in the area of risk or after the last close contact with the confirmed case. If they begin to feel unwell and develop flu-like symptoms during that 14-day period, they should seek medical assistance.

How does it spread?

Health authorities around the world believe the virus is spread from cases to close contacts, such as members of the same household. There is evidence that people are infectious before they begin to show symptoms of the virus.

What areas are a risk for novel coronavirus?

The situation is changing rapidly as more people are identified with this infection. At the current time, most cases are associated to people who have travelled to mainland China, including Hubei Province. If other cities, areas or countries become a significant risk, the department will update resources like this factsheet to advise which areas are a significant risk.

What is the Victorian Government doing about this problem?

Victoria has a world-class hospital system that is well-prepared and rehearsed to deal with an escalation of cases of any infectious disease.

The Department has long-established plans and processes in place to respond to pandemics or outbreaks.

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services is working with health authorities across Australia and the world to monitor and track the situation.

The Australian Government has announced travel restrictions and has advised that visitors from mainland China who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents, or their families will not be allowed entry into Australia. The Australian Government has also recommended that Australians should not travel to mainland China at the current time.

The department has formed an Incident Management Team (IMT) to coordinate the public health and health sector response. The IMT is actively working with stakeholders across the sector to identify cases and prevent local transmission of disease in Victoria.

The department has provided health services, health professionals and GPs with detailed guidelines on how to protect themselves while assessing and testing patients suspected of having novel coronavirus.

A Victorian Chief Health Officer Alert on the issue was first issued to health professionals on 10 January with regular updates from Victoria and the Commonwealth.

What should I do if I think I might have novel coronavirus infection?

People in the following groups are advised to self-isolate at home:

- People who were in Hubei Province until 14 days after they were last in Hubei Province;
- People who were in mainland China on or after 1 February 2020 until 14 days after they were last in mainland China;
- Close contacts of confirmed cases until 14 days after last close contact with the confirmed case.

If you are in one of these groups and become ill, call ahead to your general practitioner before attending, and inform them of your concern. You will then be isolated in a room, where available, and your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and where you have travelled.

How is the 2019-nCoV infection treated?

There is no specific treatment for disease caused by novel coronavirus. However, many of the symptoms can be treated and therefore treatment will be based on the patient's clinical condition.

How do I protect myself and my family?

The easiest way to protect yourself and your family is to pay attention to good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene.

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing with a tissue, or cough into your elbow, dispose of the tissue into a bin and then wash your hands afterwards. Wash your hands regularly, after using the toilet and before eating.

Please familiarize yourself with infection prevention guidance on the incident webpage under 'Advice for the general public' available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/novelcoronavirus>

If you have concerns about your health, please see your doctor.

Healthcare workers are recommended to consistently apply appropriate infection prevention control measures when looking after patients.

Do I need to wear a face mask?

Face masks are not recommended for use by members of the public in Victoria for the prevention of infections like novel coronavirus.

Should any health professional be required to treat a suspected or confirmed case, they will be supported by following standard infection control guidelines. Specific guidance has been provided in a Guideline for health services and general practitioners, available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-health-services-and-general-practitioners-novel-coronavirus>

Where can I find out more information?

For Victorian updates to the current incident, go to: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/novelcoronavirus>

For national updates: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/latest-information-about-novel-coronavirus>

For international updates: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/novel-coronavirus>

WHO resources <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>