

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Factsheet for the Victorian public

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 mainland China.

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

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

What is novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as MERS-CoV and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).

This novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.

Am I at risk?

Australian health authorities have declared the people at highest risk of developing novel coronavirus are:

- People who have travelled from mainland China to Australia since 1 February 2020
- People who have traveled to Hubei Province, China in the past 14 days
- Close contacts of confirmed cases of novel coronavirus
- People who have attended a healthcare facility in China in the past 14 days.

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

Some people will not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may become very ill quite quickly. Because this is such a new infection, little is known about why some get sick while others do not, and in whom there is a greater or lesser risk of serious infection.

Experience tells us that people with compromised immune systems, the very old and young and those with diagnosed heart and lung conditions are most at risk of developing complications if they contract an infection like this.

Healthcare workers are potentially at risk of infection if they are in close contact with a case of novel coronavirus infection. As a precaution, advice has been provided to healthcare workers on simple steps to reduce the risk of transmission. It is important to regularly wash your hands. Healthcare workers should wear a simple mask, gown and gloves when assessing people who might have 2019-nCoV.

What are the symptoms of novel coronavirus?

People with 2019-nCoV are most likely to have a fever, and may have respiratory symptoms like a sore throat, runny nose, cough or shortness of breath. While most people do have a fever, not all cases have reported this symptom. More information is coming to light as people are identified with this new infection, so advice may change over time.

How does novel coronavirus 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 occurring in people who have travelled from mainland China since 1 February 2020. It also includes anyone who was in Hubei Province, China in the past 14 days. If other cities, areas or countries become a significant risk, the department will update public information.

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 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 recently returned from mainland China?

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.

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

If you are ill and have travelled to mainland China, including Hubei Province, in the 14 days prior to onset of your illness, you should 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.

If there is a risk of the infection, your doctor will take a sample from your nose and throat and will organise for that sample to be tested at a laboratory to determine if you have 2019-nCoV infection. You will be asked to isolate from other people while this testing takes place.

Can my child go to school?

Exclusion from school/childcare: In accordance with national public health guidelines and current information about the coronavirus from the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer and the World Health Organization, the following staff and students should self-isolate and are excluded from childcare and school:

- 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 or your child feels sick and is within one of the three groups above:

- Seek medical attention - but first place a mask on the student if you have one and call the doctor or hospital before you go and tell them your child has been in mainland China or has had close contact with a confirmed case if that applies.
- Advise the hospital or doctor's clinic that your child has recently been in mainland China and ensure a mask is placed on your child before or as soon as you arrive at the medical facility.
- Call 000 and request an ambulance if your child has severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath, and inform the paramedics that the patient has been in mainland China.

How do we treat the 2019-nCoV infections?

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 best way to protect yourself and your family is to pay attention to good hand 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.

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

Healthcare workers are recommended to consistently apply appropriate infection prevention control measures (standard precautions) 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.

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/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus>

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