



# What you need to know about coronavirus (COVID-19)

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**COVID-19** is an illness caused by a new virus. There is no vaccination or cure yet. Find out about the disease, how it spreads, who is at risk, what to do if you think you have it, and what resources and support are available to you.

## 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 form of 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 of **COVID-19** 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 symptoms such as:

- 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.

To stop the spread of **COVID-19** people with even mild symptoms of respiratory infection should get tested.

**Respiratory allergies – allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and allergic asthma**

People who have hay fever or allergic asthma may have similar symptoms to the symptoms of **COVID-19**. Some differences are:

- fever does not occur with hay fever or allergic asthma
- itchy nose, itchy and watery eyes, and itchy throat and palate are common symptoms of hay fever but not **COVID-19**.

It can be difficult to tell if your symptoms are due to allergies or to **COVID-19**. You should stay home and get tested:

- when you first get the allergy symptoms, and
- if your symptoms are unexpected, seem different or worse than usual, or do not respond to your usual medication.

## HOW IT SPREADS

The virus can spread 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.

**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.

## WHO IS MOST AT RISK

In Australia, the people most at risk of catching the virus are:

- travellers who have recently been overseas
- those 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.

You are at high risk of serious illness from **COVID-19** if you:

- are age 70 years and older
- have certain conditions which compromise their immune systems.

You are at moderate risk of serious illness from COVID-19 if you:

- have certain chronic conditions.

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.

At this stage the risk to children and babies, and the role children play in the transmission of COVID-19, is not clear. However, there has so far been a low rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases among children, relative to the broader population. For more information about COVID-19 and children please read this fact sheet.

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

## PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Everyone must do the following things to slow the spread of **COVID-19** and protect those who are most at risk.

See important advice on:

- good hygiene
- physical distancing
- public gatherings
- isolation
- masks.

## HOW TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

If you are sick and think you have symptoms of **COVID-19**, seek medical advice and get tested. If you want to talk to someone about your symptoms, call the National Coronavirus Helpline for advice.

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 symptoms
- any travel history
- any recent contact you have had with someone who has **COVID-19**.