



Coronavirus (Covid 19) Awareness

Key Facts about COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. ‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as ‘2019 novel coronavirus’ or ‘2019-nCoV.’

The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

Pathogen characteristics

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some infect people and are known to cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). A novel coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not previously been identified in humans. The latest novel coronavirus, now called COVID-19 virus, had not been detected before the outbreak reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. So far, the main clinical signs and symptoms reported in people during this outbreak include fever, coughing, difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing bilateral lung infiltrates. Although the current outbreak of COVID-19 is still evolving, infection may present with mild, moderate or severe illness and can be passed from human to human, primarily (as in other respiratory viruses) by droplet spread. While about 80% of cases manifest as a mild illness (i.e. non-pneumonia or mild pneumonia), approximately 20% progress to a more severe illness, with 6% requiring specialist medical care, including mechanical ventilation. Situation reports on the outbreak, updated daily, are available on the WHO website.²⁰ Most estimates of the incubation period of COVID-19 range from 1 to 14 days, with a median of 5–6 days.²¹ This means that if a person remains well 14 days after exposure (i.e. contact with an infected person), they may not have been infected. However, these estimates may be updated as more data becomes available.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. On rare occasions, the disease can be fatal. These symptoms are similar to the flu (influenza) or the common cold, which are a lot more common than COVID-19. This is why testing is required to confirm if someone has COVID-19.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever
- Flu-like symptoms such as **coughing**, **sore throat** and **fatigue**
- Shortness of breath.
- Not everyone who has symptoms like these has COVID-19 as there are several other illnesses that can cause these symptoms

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing). Individuals can also be infected from and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it.

- COVID-19 spreads from person to person through droplet transmission
- Droplets are small pieces of saliva, which are produced when a person coughs or sneezes
- Droplets usually travel no further than one metre through the air
- You can become infected if:
- You have close contact with an infected person who coughs or sneezes
- You touch an object (e.g. door handle) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with COVID-19 and touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Droplets cannot go through skin and can only lead to infection if it comes in contact with your mouth, nose or eyes

How is the novel Coronavirus COVID-19 transmitted?

Other human Coronavirus strains are spread from one sick person to another through:

- Contaminated droplets (coughing or sneezing)
- Contaminated hands and surfaces



How long can the virus survive on surfaces?

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, including:

- The type of surface the virus is on
- Whether it is exposed to sunlight
- Differences in temperature and humidity
- Exposure to cleaning products.

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surface is likely to have decreased significantly within 48 hours. Once such viruses are transferred to hands, they survive for very short lengths of time. Regular cleaning of hands and frequently touched hard surfaces with disinfectants will therefore help to reduce the risk of infection.

Who is most at risk?

We are learning more about how COVID-19 affects people every day. Older people, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, appear to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms. As this is a new virus, we are still learning about how it affects children. We know it is possible for people of any age to be infected with the virus, but so far there are relatively few cases of COVID-19 reported among children. This is a new virus and we need to learn more about how it affects children. The virus can be fatal in rare cases, so far mainly among older people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Higher Risk Population

Some people at higher risk for developing serious illness from COVID-19 include:

- Older people
- Those with underlying medical problems including **high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, respiratory disease or immune deficiencies (low immunity)**.
- Experience higher rates of chronic diseases compared to other Australians and may be at higher risk of serious illness.

COVID-19; Who can catch it?

- Anybody can be infected
- COVID-19 does not discriminate between race nor gender, therefore, we are all at risk of infection
- We all need to be safe

There are important things that we can do to protect ourselves, our family and those in our care.