



# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Frequently asked questions

### General information about COVID-19

#### What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness in humans and animals. Human coronavirus illnesses are generally mild, like the common cold.

However, some coronaviruses can cause severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

#### What is the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

This is a new coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. It is a new strain of coronaviruses that hasn't previously been identified in humans.

COVID-19 is closely related to SARS and in the same family of viruses as MERS.

#### What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms include fever, sore throat, shortness of breath, cough, acute loss of taste and smell or runny nose. Symptoms can range from mild illness to severe pneumonia. From what we know now about COVID-19, the symptoms can start between 1 and 14 days after exposure to the virus.

#### How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 can be spread from person-to-person. This can happen when a person comes into contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person, for example through coughing or sneezing.

Spread of this coronavirus can also occur through touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

#### Who is most at risk of COVID-19?

All people are at risk of infection, but some groups are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill. These groups include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. See this page on the Department of Health website for more information
- People 70 years and older
- People with compromised immune systems.

## Testing

### Should I be tested if I don't have symptoms (if I am "asymptomatic")?

Testing people without symptoms is only permitted under certain circumstances:

- Before proceeding with organ donation or organ transplantation
- Participants in targeted government approved screening programs e.g. DETECT borders
- Returned travellers prior to release from mandatory quarantine
- Testing for entry requirements for overseas governments
- Under public health direction in certain high-risk settings.
- People who have been given a [Presentation for Testing Direction](#)
- People who are subject to the [Transport, Freight and Logistics Directions for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Asymptomatic testing should not be carried out for work purposes or "fit for work purposes", unless requested or approved by Public Health.

### Why won't I get tested if I don't have symptoms?

Unless you fall in to one of the approved categories that permits testing of people without symptoms, you cannot be tested. The reason for this is, in the early stages of infection (before people have symptoms), it may not be possible to detect the virus. Testing when you do not have symptoms could give a false negative result.

### Can I be tested?

A person will be considered for testing if they meet any of the following criteria:

- presenting with a fever ( $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) OR a recent history of a fever (e.g. night sweats, chills) without a known source OR
- an acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, runny nose) OR
- acute (sudden or unexplained) loss of smell or taste OR
- they have been given a Direction to be tested OR
- they fit into a category where asymptomatic testing is permitted (see "Should I be tested if I don't have symptoms?")

It is important if you have respiratory illness symptoms to stay at home until you are well.

### Where can I be tested?

COVID clinics are open across the Perth metropolitan and regional areas.

People seeking testing in regional areas, where there isn't a COVID clinic should go to a public hospital, health service or remote health clinic. Make sure you phone ahead to advise of your symptoms. Find out [where to get tested for COVID-19 in regional and remote areas of WA](#)

Patients with a GP referral can now also be tested for COVID-19 at selected Chief Health Officer approved private pathology collection centres, and Commonwealth endorsed GP respiratory clinics.

For more information on where to go if you have been given a Direction to be tested, visit the [COVID-19 testing](#) webpage.

Find a [COVID clinic or private pathology collection centre](#) near you.

## **I need to travel overseas to return home. Can I have a test to meet the entry requirements for the place I am returning to?**

This testing is permitted at private pathology collection centres ONLY and should not occur at WA government COVID clinics. A GP will need to request the test after you have provided written evidence to them that a negative test result is a condition of entry to the country to which you are travelling. For more information on what is required please see the [Chief Health Officer Approval to Request COVID-19 Testing on Patients who are required to Provide Evidence of a Negative COVID-19 Test to Meet the Visa Entry Requirements of Overseas Governments \(No.2\)](#)

## **Why is point of care serological testing prohibited in WA?**

The rapid finger-prick test detects antibodies that develop because of COVID-19 infection. The antibodies take at least 5 to 7 days to become detectable by these basic tests. If used in the early stages of COVID-19, before a person has developed antibodies to the virus, there is a risk that the test will come back negative. There are concerns that the use of these tests to diagnose COVID-19 will result in false negative results, i.e. the test will be negative when the person has the disease.

## **How do I get medical clearance for work?**

It is not possible to obtain a “medical clearance” for COVID-19 unless you are a confirmed case of COVID-19. In the early stages of infection (before people have symptoms), it may not be possible to detect the virus. Testing when you do not have symptoms could give a false negative result.

## **Treatment**

### **What is the treatment for COVID-19?**

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 and, in most cases, symptoms will resolve on their own.

### **Is there a vaccine?**

There are currently no available vaccines for COVID-19.

### **How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

The current testing available for COVID-19 includes obtaining nose and throat swabs. These are then sent to the laboratory for PCR testing.

### **What if I don't have Medicare cover?**

Most travellers to WA will have travel insurance. To support the WA Health response to COVID-19, the Minister for Health has confirmed that those people who are not eligible for Medicare AND who present to WA Health facilities for assessment in relation to COVID-19 infection, will not be charged out of pocket expenses.

## **Self-quarantine and Self-isolation**

### **What does self-quarantine mean?**

Self-quarantine refers to people who have no symptoms: people need to self-quarantine if they are at greater risk of having COVID-19 (for example they may have had close contact with someone who is unwell with COVID-19 or have just returned from overseas).

Self-quarantine means you must remain in your home, hotel room or other accommodation for 14 days.

## What does self-isolation mean?

Isolation refers to people with symptoms or known disease: people need to self-isolate if they have tested positive to COVID-19 or if they have symptoms and have undergone a COVID-19 test and are waiting on results. People waiting on test results will need to stay in self-isolation until they receive their test results. People who test positive to COVID-19 will need to stay in self-isolation until they are cleared by the Public Health Unit.

## Do I need to self-quarantine / self-isolate?

People MUST self-quarantine / self-isolate in the following circumstances:

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19: you must self-isolate in your home (or other suitable accommodation) until you have recovered and have been cleared by the Department of Health;
- If you have been tested for COVID-19: you must self-isolate in your home (or other suitable accommodation) while you are waiting for your result;
- If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19: you must self-quarantine in your home (or other suitable accommodation) for 14 days after the date of last contact with the confirmed case;
- If you arrive into Western Australia from overseas, you will be directed to mandatory self-quarantine in accommodation provided by the WA government, and given information on mandatory self-quarantine.

People who do not comply face a fine of up to \$50,000 for individuals and \$250,000 for body corporates. This is essential for the health and wellbeing of the community.

## What should I do if I have contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 infection?

Your Public Health Unit will contact you if you are a close contact of someone who has been confirmed to have COVID-19. They will give you specific information about what to do when you are a close-contact. You will be asked to self-quarantine for 14 days since you last had contact with the infected person, and to report any symptoms to the Public Health Unit.

If you develop respiratory illness symptoms while in self-quarantine you will need to contact your local Public Health Unit for advice. Let them know you are in self-quarantine due to suspected COVID-19 infection.

For more information you can view the WA Health website at <https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus>

## What should I do if I need to self-quarantine or self-isolate in a hotel?

People returning from overseas who are subject to mandatory quarantine in a State managed quarantine centre (hotel) will be given specific information relating to their stay in a hotel.

Other people may need to self-quarantine or self-isolate in a hotel (e.g. you may be a close contact of a COVID-19 case and can't self-quarantine in your usual accommodation). You should phone the hotel prior to attending and explain that you are required to self-quarantine for 14 days. This will enable the hotel to segregate you from other guests during check-in and ensure 1.5 metres physical distancing can be maintained between you and other guests / staff. If you need to use a lift to reach your room, the hotel should arrange for you to ride solo to your floor.

For more information see our fact sheet for [accommodation providers who have guests who are self-isolating.](#)

## **I am in self-quarantine or self-isolation in a hotel. Can I move around the hotel?**

No, when you are in self-quarantine or self-isolation, you must not leave the hotel room for any purpose during your 14-day self-quarantine period, unless for an emergency e.g. fire. This means you cannot walk through the corridors or go for a walk outside. If the room has a private balcony or private courtyard you can go into these areas. If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and are self-isolating in a hotel you cannot leave until you have been cleared by the Public Health Unit.

## **I am caring for someone who has (or could have) COVID-19, how can I protect myself?**

Anyone in the home with a respiratory illness should be cared for in a single room, where practicable. Isolating sick people in single rooms reduces the risk of transmission to others.

Read the information below on how to 'protect yourself and others from COVID-19' to reduce the chances of spreading infections at home.

If it is not possible to keep the potentially infected person in a room by themselves, try to follow these principles to reduce chances of disease spread:

- as a priority, place people with excessive cough and phlegm in single rooms
- if there is more than one person with the same symptoms, they can be placed together in the same room
- importantly, ensure that people sharing a room are physically separated (more than 1.5 metres) from each other.

## **Can employees return to work if their family members are in a 14-day self-quarantine?**

The employee can go to work. However, if the family member in quarantine becomes symptomatic and requires testing during the 14 days of self-quarantine, then the employee may need to self-quarantine once the results of the family member's COVID-19 test is known.

If the family member's test result is positive for COVID-19 the employee will be contacted by their Public Health Unit if they need to self-quarantine.

## **Protect yourselves and others from COVID-19**

To stop the spread of coronavirus, everyone must:

- practise good hygiene
- practise physical distancing
- know the limits for public gatherings
- understand how to self-isolate if you need to.

## **How do I practise good hygiene?**

- Wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitiser.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use your inner elbow. Throw the tissue in the bin immediately.
- Stay home if you're sick. Do not go to work or school.
- Clean surfaces and objects such as doorknobs, benches, table tops, keyboards and phones regularly.

## **Should I wear a face mask?**

WA Health does not recommend the use of facemasks for the general public to prevent the risk

of contracting COVID-19.

However, if you are in an area where community transmission is occurring, and physical distancing is difficult to maintain, covering your face with a mask can provide some protection. For more information see:

- Advice on the use of masks in the community [Australian Government \(external site\)](#)
- How to wear a mask correctly [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care \(external site\)](#)
- [How to make a cloth mask \(external link\)](#)

### **What is physical distancing?**

Physical distancing means reducing the number of close physical and social contacts we have with other people.

Steps for physical distancing in public includes:

- minimising all unnecessary contact with others
- keeping at least 1.5 metres (minimum) away from others
- avoiding physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs and kisses
- using tap and pay instead of cash

For more information about how to practise social distancing at home, work, school or keeping in touch with others, visit the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#).

## **Other information**

### **Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick?**

There are isolated cases from overseas where domestic animals, primarily cats, become infected with COVID-19 virus when kept in close contact with an owner sick with COVID-19. While you are sick, minimise contact with pets and other animals and wash your hands before handling animals.

### **Can domestic animals infect people with COVID-19?**

There is no evidence that domestic animals play a role in the spread of COVID-19. COVID-19 is being transmitted from person to person. It is standard hygiene to wash your hands after handling animals.

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