



# Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

## Information for Employers

***An outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in late December 2019.***

### Can I go to work?

You are advised that you must isolate yourself at home if:

- You have left Hubei Province less than 14 days ago (until 14 days after you left Hubei)
- You have been identified as close contacts of proven cases of novel coronavirus (until 14 days after last contact with the confirmed case)
- You have left, or transited through, mainland China on or after 1 February 2020 (until 14 days after leaving China).

If you develop symptoms (listed below) within 14 days of returning from anywhere in mainland China or within 14 days of contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, you should arrange to see your usual doctor for urgent assessment. You should telephone the health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your recent travel history or close contact history. Your doctor will liaise with Public Health authorities to manage your care. You must remain isolated in your home or a healthcare setting until Public Health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Employees who are self-isolated due to one of the above situations should alert their employer to discuss alternative arrangements such as working from home.

### What should I tell my staff?

Employers should provide information and brief all employees and contract staff, including domestic and cleaning staff where applicable, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of 2019-nCoV to people in an employment setting. You should inform staff who meet the above criteria that they should remain isolated in their home. Employees should advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period, particularly if they have been in the workplace. Public Health authorities may contact employers in the event an employee is confirmed to have novel coronavirus.

### What does isolate in your home mean?

People who are isolated should not attend public places, in particular work, school, childcare, or public gatherings. Only people who usually live in your household should be in the home. Do not allow visitors into the home. There is no need to wear masks in the home. Where possible, get others such as friends or family, who are not required to be isolated, to get food or other necessities for you. If you must leave the home, such as to seek medical care, wear a surgical mask.

## What is this virus?

Coronaviruses can make humans and animals sick. Some coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold and others can cause more serious diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

The virus seen in mainland China is called 'novel' because it is new. It has not been detected before this outbreak. Most people currently infected live in, or have travelled to mainland China. There have been some cases of 2019-nCoV reported in other countries. It is likely that the virus originally came from an animal, and there is now evidence that it can spread from person-to-person.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can range from mild illness to severe illness including pneumonia, and include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath.

## How is the virus spread?

The virus is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct contact with a person whilst they are infectious;
- contact with droplets when a person with a confirmed infection coughs or sneezes; or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as doorknobs or tables) that were contaminated by droplets from secretions coughed or sneezed from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

## For how long can a person spread the infection to other people?

The length of time that a person is infectious, that is, can spread the infection to others, is not yet known. However, there has been emerging evidence of asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic infection and pre-symptomatic transmission in at least one case cluster. It is therefore likely that a person can spread the infection from before the time they first develop symptoms until up to one day after symptoms stop.

Therefore, the Australian Government Department of Health is currently recommending an isolation period of 14 days for return travellers from mainland China, and for contacts of confirmed cases.

## Who is most at risk of a serious illness?

Some people who are infected may not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may become very ill, very quickly.

From previous experience with other coronaviruses, the people at most risk of serious infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems;
- elderly people;
- very young children and babies;
- people with diagnosed heart and lung conditions; and
- Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islanders.

## What if an employee has already returned to work but should have been isolated?

Employees should inform your employer as soon as possible that you have recently travelled to mainland China or had contact with a confirmed case, and isolate yourself for the remainder of the 14 day period.

If you go on to develop mild symptoms:

- immediately isolate yourself from others in your home;
- call your usual doctor or local hospital and tell them you may have novel coronavirus infection;
- when you get to the doctor's clinic or hospital, tell them again that you may have novel coronavirus infection; and
- as soon as possible, please call your employer to notify them that you have developed symptoms and will be tested for the novel coronavirus.

If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing:

- call **000** and ask for an ambulance;
- tell the ambulance officers that you may have novel coronavirus infection; and
- as soon as possible, please call your employer to notify them that you have developed symptoms and will be tested for the novel coronavirus.

Your doctor will test you for 2019-nCoV and provide advice on your care. You will also be contacted by Public Health officers who will provide you with more information and who will coordinate with your employer as needed.

## How can we help prevent the spread of the virus?

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence:

- wash your hands often with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand gel, before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet;
- avoid contact with others; and
- cough and sneeze into your elbow.

## What precautions should I take if I am a cleaner?

Cleaning staff should minimise their risk of being infected with novel coronavirus by wearing gloves while cleaning and using alcohol hand rub before and after wearing gloves. As an added precaution, cleaning staff may wish to wear a surgical mask while cleaning rooms or areas of the workplace where person with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus or a person in self-isolation has frequented. If a confirmed case of novel coronavirus or a person in self-isolation is in a room that cleaning staff need to enter, they may inquire if people are well, and ask them to put on a surgical mask if they have one available.

## Is Coronavirus spread through food and water?

Some Coronaviruses can potentially survive in the gastrointestinal tract and be spread by the faecal oral route however, food borne spread is unlikely when food is properly cooked and prepared. With good food preparation as well as good food hygiene (hand washing etc), it is highly unlikely that you will become infected with novel coronavirus through food.

It is unknown at this time if the virus is able to survive in sewerage. Those who work closely with sewerage should take the same precautions as those outlined above for cleaners. Drinking water

in Australia is high quality and is well treated. It is not anticipated that drinking water will be affected by novel coronavirus.

## Does wearing a mask help reduce my risk in the workplace?

Facemasks are not recommended for members of the general public. Your best approach to avoid getting sick is to practise good hand hygiene and avoid contact with people who are sick. If you are likely to come into contact with someone has novel coronavirus, such as in the situations outlined above, you may choose to wear a surgical mask.

A facemask will not protect you against becoming infected. While the use of facemasks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, **face masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like novel coronavirus.**

## Where do I get further information?

Visit the Australian Government Department of Health homepage at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

Call the Public Health Information Line on 1800 004 599.

Contact your state or territory Public Health Authority:

- ACT call 02 5124 9213 during business hours or (02) 9962 4155 after hours
- NSW call 1300 066 055
- NT call 08 8922 8044.
- Qld call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- SA call 1300 232 272
- Tas call 1800 671 738
- Vic call 1300 651 160
- WA call 08 9328 0553 or call your local [public health unit](#)