



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 such as the common cold.

However, some coronaviruses can cause severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which was identified in 2002, and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), which was identified in 2012.

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 shortness of breath or cough, with or without a fever. In some cases, the virus can cause severe pneumonia. From what we know now about COVID-19, the symptoms can start between 2 and 14 days from 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 from person-to-person is usually between close contacts. Close contacts are usually defined as those people who have been face-to-face with a person infected with the virus for at least 15 minutes or been in the same closed space for at least 2 hours with an infected person.

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 a person with a confirmed infection, 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?

No. There is no reason to be tested for COVID-19 if you do not have symptoms.

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

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.

Who can be tested?

General public and high-risk staff

General public and high-risk staff will be tested if they meet the following criteria:

- presenting with a fever ($\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$)
- a history of a fever in the last few days OR
- an acute respiratory infection e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat.

High-risk settings

Testing will also be arranged for anyone from the following high-risk settings where two or more people meet the above criteria. This includes healthcare workers, including aged care and disability workers, and Western Australian Police Officers.

- aged and residential care
- rural and remote Aboriginal communities
- detention centres
- correctional facilities
- boarding schools
- military barracks or equivalent
- geographically localised areas with increased risk of community transmission
- cruise ship passengers or returned travellers (international and domestic).

Even if you do not meet the COVID-19 testing criteria, please remember, all respiratory infections are infectious. It is important if you have respiratory illness symptoms to stay at home until you are well.

Where can I be tested?

People that meet the testing criteria can be tested at COVID clinics or select private pathology collection centres.

There are **COVID clinics** across Perth metropolitan and two clinics in regional areas at Bunbury Health Campus and Broome Hospital.

People seeking testing in regional areas where there are no COVID clinics should go to a public hospital, health service or remote health clinic. Make sure you phone ahead to advise of your symptoms.

Patients with a GP referral can be tested at select **private pathology collection centres**.

For COVID clinic or private pathology collection centre locations, visit our [website](#).

Why is point of care serological testing prohibited in WA?

This test, which is administered through a rapid finger-prick, detects antibodies that develop as a result of COVID-19 infection. The antibodies will likely take 5 to 7 days to become detectable by these basic tests. Therefore, these tests are of limited use for the diagnosis of acute (early) infection. 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 is 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 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-isolation

What should I do if I come into 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. You will be asked to stay isolated 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-isolation you will need to contact your local Public Health Unit for advice. Let them know you are in self-isolation due to suspected COVID-19 infection.

WA Department of Health fact sheets:

- [COVID-19 Self-isolation for close contacts and returned travellers \(PDF 93KB\)](#)
- [COVID-19 self-isolation information for people undergoing testing](#)

What does self-isolation mean?

Self-isolation means you **must stay in your home, hotel room, or other accommodation** even if you are perfectly well with no symptoms. If you live in a unit or apartment block you must stay in your unit or apartment. **You cannot attend public places such as work, school, shopping centres or go on a holiday.** Only people who usually live with you should be in the home. Do not see visitors.

You must stay in your place of isolation and **NOT GO OUT**, except to seek medical care. You should call ahead for advice.

If you require urgent medical assistance call 000 and let them know that you are in self-isolation due to COVID-19.

Other people who live in your home do not need to self-isolate and can go about their usual activities provided the above precautions are followed. However, if you develop symptoms and become a confirmed COVID-19 case your family may need to self-isolate. Your Public Health Unit will advise you.

Do I need to self-isolate?

People **MUST** 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 been told you can be released from isolation;
- If you have been tested for COVID-19: you must isolate yourself 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 isolate yourself in your home (or other suitable accommodation) for 14 days after the date of last contact with the confirmed case;
- If you arrived into Western Australia from interstate in the last 14 days: you must self-isolate in your home (or other suitable accommodation) for 14 days from the date of arrival (some exemptions may apply);
- If you have returned from overseas in the last 14 days, you will be subject to mandatory self-isolation for 14 days at your first Australian destination. Suitable accommodation will be made available. You will not be permitted to return home or transit to another state until your 14-day self-isolation period is completed.

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 need to self-isolate in a hotel?

Some people may need to self-isolate in a hotel (e.g. you may be a close contact of a COVID-19 case and can't self-isolate in your usual accommodation). If this is your situation you should phone the hotel prior to attending and explain that you are required to self-isolate for 14 days. This will enable the hotel to segregate you from other guests during check-in. The concierge or other hotel staff should meet you ideally outside on arrival or expedite your movement through to an area where 1.5 metres social distancing can be maintained. Check in should be done as quickly as practicable and consideration should be given to on-line check in where available. If you need to use an elevator to reach your room, the hotel should arrange for you to ride solo in the elevator to your floor.

For more information see our fact sheet on [self-isolating in hotels](#).

I am in self-isolation in a hotel. Can I move around the hotel?

No, when you are in self-isolation, you must not leave the hotel room for any purpose during your 14-day self-isolation 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.

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-isolation?

The employee can go to work. However, if the family member becomes symptomatic and requires testing during the 14 days of self-isolation, then the employee may need to self-isolate until 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-isolate.

Travel

Do all travellers coming to Western Australia need to self-isolate?

YES, although some exemptions will apply for domestic travel. :

Domestic travel:

- If you arrived into Western Australia by air, sea, rail or road in the last 14 days: you must

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self-isolate in your home (or other suitable accommodation) for 14 days from the date of arrival (some exemptions may apply).

- You must travel as soon as possible from your arrival point to a suitable premises (accommodation) to self-isolate for 14 days, using the most direct route of travel and taking all reasonable steps to avoid coming within 1.5m of another person at any time.
- Exemptions:
 - Exemptions will apply to essential services and essential workers, including health and emergency services, defence and policing, mining industry workforces, flight crews and freight of essential goods, via ports and trucks – with strict guidelines in place to monitor and manage this.
 - There will also be exemptions granted on compassionate grounds and where people live near border communities.
 - Arrivals will have to show they meet the essential arrival criteria to be granted an exemption.

International travel:

- If you have returned from overseas in the last 14 days, you will be subject to mandatory self-isolation for 14 days at your first Australian destination. Suitable accommodation will be made available. You will not be permitted to return home or transit to another state until your 14 self-isolation period is completed. For more information see [Smartraveller](#) and the [WA Government website](#).

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.

Can I still travel in WA?

To assist in reducing the spread of COVID-19, the WA Government has introduced further restrictions on travel within Western Australia. After 11:59pm Tuesday, 31 March 2020, Western Australians will not be allowed to travel outside their designated region.

Western Australian intrastate travel is defined as movement through the boundaries of the regions of Western Australia.

These regions are:

- Perth and Peel (due to their proximity, the Perth and Peel regions will form oneregion)
- South West
- Great Southern
- Goldfields-Esperance (stronger restrictions apply)
- Mid-West
- Wheatbelt
- Gascoyne
- Pilbara (stronger restrictions apply to parts of the Shire of East Pilbara)
- Kimberley (stronger restrictions apply to the entire Kimberley region)

Some exemptions will apply. For more information go to [WA.gov.au](#)

Protect yourselves and others from COVID-19

To stop the spread of coronavirus, everyone must:

- practise good hygiene
- practise social 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?

WAHealth does not recommend the use of facemasks for the general public to prevent the risk of contracting COVID-19. For more information see the Australian Government [fact sheet on face masks](#).

Home-made face masks sewn from fabric provide inadequate protection against COVID-19.

What is social distancing?

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

Steps for social 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
- avoiding any gatherings, even at home, of more than a few people
- avoiding public gatherings and congregating in groups.

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](#).

Are public gatherings still allowed?

Non-essential gatherings have been suspended to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

The current restrictions now limit both indoor and outdoor gatherings to two persons only.

The WA Government's strong guidance to all Western Australians is to stay home unless for:

- shopping for what you need - food, takeaway, and necessary supplies
- medical or health care needs, including compassionate requirements
- exercise in compliance with the public gathering requirements
- work and study if you can't work or learn remotely.

Exceptions to this limit include:

- people of the same household going out together
- funerals - a maximum of 10 people
- weddings - a maximum of 5 people.

All playgrounds, skate parks and outside gyms in public places are now closed.

In all cases, appropriate social distancing and hygiene practices should be applied. View the [Australian Government advice on public gatherings for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Other information

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

There is no current evidence that pets are at risk from a potentially infected case. While you are sick, wear a facemask if you must care for or be around pets or other animals.

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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