

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Q&As

What is the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). A novel coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus that hasn't previously been identified in humans. In January 2020 officials identified a new coronavirus, COVID-19. Visit www.covid19.govt.nz or the [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int) website for more on COVID-19.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to a range of other respiratory illnesses such as influenza and do not necessarily mean that you have COVID-19. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, loss of smell, or the signs of a head cold (runny nose, sneezing, post-nasal drip).

Are there currently cases in New Zealand?

Yes. For the latest information on cases in New Zealand, visit the [Ministry of Health's website](http://www.health.govt.nz).

What can I do to protect myself?

As with other respiratory illnesses, it's important to follow basic hand and respiratory hygiene measures to reduce the risk of infection:

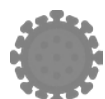
- [Cover coughs and sneezes](#) with disposable tissues or your crooked elbow. Put used tissues in the bin and [wash your hands](#) afterwards.
- Avoid close contact (two metres or less) with people suffering acute respiratory infections
- Frequently and thoroughly (at least 20 seconds) wash and dry hands with soap and water, especially after contact with ill people or their environment. Hand sanitiser can be used if you don't have access to soap or water.

Should I wear a mask?

For **most people**, wearing face masks isn't recommended as there is limited evidence they prevent the spread of disease. You only need to wear a mask if you are sick with symptoms (coughing and sneezing). The World Health Organization's advice on face masks can be found [here](#), and they have produced [videos on when and how to use masks](#). New Zealand Ministry of Health advice on masks and other personal protective equipment can also be found [here](#). If you start experiencing symptoms, or have health-related concerns about COVID-19, call the dedicated Healthline number: **0800 358 5453**.

Is there treatment for novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

There is no specific treatment for disease caused by COVID-19. However, many of the symptoms can be treated based on the patient's clinical condition - for example, breathing support for people with breathing problems. Current information shows most people with this virus are not severely ill. However, infection with COVID-19 can increase the risk of developing pneumonia. Pneumonia requires urgent medical attention and can be treated. As this is a new virus, there is currently no vaccine available.



I have recently been overseas. I'm in self-isolation but feel fine and have no symptoms. Can I return to work early if I get cleared by my doctor?

No. Anyone arriving in New Zealand **must** self-isolate for 14 days, even if they feel well and have no symptoms. The time is set at 14 days as it may take up to two weeks to start showing symptoms of infection. **Even when the 14 days has passed, you will still need to adhere to the requirements of New Zealand's current alert level.** Right now, New Zealand is at Alert Level 4. That means all New Zealanders, except for those who work in essential services, should stay at home. You will not be able to return to work until your isolation period is finished and the alert level is lowered. For more information, visit www.covid19.govt.nz.

I've recently been overseas and am now in self-isolation back in New Zealand. My employer is asking for a medical certificate to prove I'm entitled to be away for the 14-day isolation period. Do I have to provide one?

You do not need to supply a medical certificate to your employer. If asked, you can supply copies of the relevant travel documents detailing your travel dates and destinations to prove your need to self-isolate. **Even when the 14 days has passed, you will still need to adhere to the requirements of New Zealand's current alert level.** Right now, New Zealand is at Alert Level 4. That means all New Zealanders, except for those who work in essential services, should stay at home. You will not be able to return to work until your isolation period is finished and the alert level is lowered. For more information, visit www.covid19.govt.nz.

Can I still travel overseas?

The government is advising New Zealanders not to travel overseas at this time. Visit www.safetravel.govt.nz for more information.

Can coronaviruses be transmitted from person to person?

Yes. COVID-2019 can be spread from person to person via droplet transmission. People are potentially infectious for 48 hours before showing symptoms.

How is novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spread?

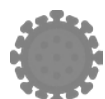
The scientific evidence confirms that coronavirus is spread by droplets. This means that when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, they may generate droplets containing the virus. These droplets are too large to stay in the air for long, so they quickly settle on surrounding surfaces. Droplet-spread diseases can be spread by:

- coughing and sneezing
- close personal contact
- contact with an object or surface with viral particles on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

That's why it's really important to practice good hygiene, regularly wash and thoroughly dry your hands and practice good cough etiquette.

What is the incubation period of COVID-19?

It is still unknown how long it takes for a person to develop symptoms after being exposed to someone with the virus. Based on the characteristics of other coronaviruses, it is likely to be between one and 14 days, with most cases developing illness after five to six days.



What advice is there for Early Learning Services, schools and tertiary facilities?

Advice for the education sector is available on the Ministry of Education's website [here](#).

Is there testing available for COVID-19?

Yes. New Zealand laboratories are able to test for the novel coronavirus and Community Based Assessment Centres have been set up around the country. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, loss of smell, or the signs of a head cold - runny nose, sneezing, post-nasal drip), call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 for advice about whether you should be tested and what to do next. Testing involves a health professional taking a swab from the back of the throat. If you are having difficulty breathing, this can be a sign of pneumonia, you should call for an ambulance on 111.

Can I pay for private COVID-19 lab testing?

No.

How many confirmed cases have there been globally?

The latest international information is available via the Situation Reports on the World Health Organization website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>.

I am a GP, where can I find more clinical information?

The latest Ministry of Health information for primary care is available in the *Advice for health professionals* section of the [Ministry's novel coronavirus webpage](#). Latest information is also being issued regularly via MEDINZ, and resources (such as the Auckland region case notification form) are available on the [Auckland Regional Public Health Service website](#).

I've recently had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Am I at risk?

If you have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with novel coronavirus (COVID-19), you may have been exposed and infected with the virus. People may potentially be infectious for up to 48 hours before they develop any symptoms.

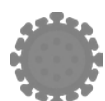
You will need to self-isolate for 14-days from the time you last had contact with the infected person. That's because in some people, it can take up to two weeks before they start showing signs of being sick (if they have been infected). [Information on how to self-isolate](#) is available at www.covid19.govt.nz. If you become unwell or start experiencing symptoms, call your local doctor or Healthline on 0800 358 5453 for advice. The Healthline service is free, operates 24/7 and has interpreters available. If you have difficulty breathing, call emergency services by dialling 111. Tell them that you're a close contact of someone with COVID-19.

Is there any financial or other help available to me? I'm currently without an income due to the impact of COVID-19.

For information about the [financial](#) and other support available to you, visit www.covid19.govt.nz.

Are health workers at greater risk?

Health care workers come into contact with sick people more often than the general public, and have closer contact with them. That's why the health care sector has infection prevention and control measures in place to reduce the risk for patients, staff and the public. Healthcare



professionals are receiving advice as it comes to hand and have previously planned and prepared for similar viruses, such as the SARS virus in 2003, which was also caused by a coronavirus.

For more information, visit the following websites:

- www.covid19.govt.nz
- www.health.govt.nz/coronavirus
- [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int)

