



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 a fever ($\geq 37.50C$) or a recent history of fever (e.g. night sweats, chills), without a known source, or acute respiratory symptoms (including cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose), or an acute loss of smell or taste. 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

When should I get tested?

WA Health recommends anyone with the following symptoms get tested:

- a fever ($\geq 37.50\text{C}$);
- a recent history of fever (e.g. sweats at night, whole body chills) without a known source;
- acute respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose);
- acute loss of smell or loss of taste.

Testing is especially important for people with any of the following epidemiological criteria:

- close contact with a confirmed case.
- international travel or recent domestic travel to areas with local transmission of SARS-CoV-2.
- workers supporting designated COVID-19 quarantine and isolation services.
- international border staff.
- International air and maritime crew.
- health care and aged care workers with direct patient contact.

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

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

Testing of asymptomatic people is only permitted under certain circumstances, which have been approved by the Chief Health Officer. Asymptomatic testing should not be carried out for work purposes or "fit for work purposes", unless requested or approved by Public Health.

Currently, asymptomatic testing is permitted in the following scenarios:

- People from cohorts who are required to present for testing under a [Direction](#).
- Before proceeding to organ donation or organ transplantation.
- DETECT BORDERS program.
- Testing for entry requirements by overseas countries for immigration or travel.
- People who are required to be tested by another jurisdiction.

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.

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 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.

Why do I need to stay in quarantine after my day 12 test?

The incubation period for COVID-19 is 1 to 14 days. This means that you could develop symptoms of COVID-19 up to 14 days after exposure, even if you have tested negative on day 12. You must remain in quarantine for 14 days. If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 at any time during your quarantine period, including after your day 12 test, please get tested.

Treatment

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

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

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (Australia’s regulatory authority for therapeutic goods) has granted provisional approval for the use of remdesivir in COVID-19 patients who have been hospitalised and are severely unwell with COVID-19 symptoms (e.g. require oxygen to breathe). While this is promising, it is important to emphasise that remdesivir has not been shown to prevent coronavirus infection or relieve milder cases of infection and is not permitted to be used for these purposes.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes. The WA COVID-19 vaccination program is planned to rollout, in a phased approach, over the course of 2021. For the most current information on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, please visit the [HealthyWA COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#) and the [COVID-19 vaccine FAQs](#).

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

In WA, the approved testing method used to diagnose COVID-19 involves obtaining nose and throat swabs which are sent to the laboratory for Polymerase Chain Reaction (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.

When 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 quarantine in accommodation provided by the WA government, and given information on mandatory quarantine.

There may be other situations where you may be required to self-quarantine, such as if you have arrived from a location in Australia where community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring.

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-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 required to attend a COVID clinic as I am in self-quarantine but don't have my own car to get there? Can I use a taxi or a bus?

You must go to the nearest COVID Clinic to get tested, by the most direct route, and you must always wear a mask while travelling to and from the COVID Clinic.

You can travel by private vehicle; by rideshare vehicle (e.g. taxi or uber); or walk (if you are within 2km of the COVID Clinic).

If you are travelling by rideshare vehicle, you must inform the driver of the vehicle that you are in self-quarantine, and both you and the driver must wear a mask.

You **MUST NOT** use public transport (such as a bus or train) to travel to the COVID Clinic.

I am in quarantine, but have an appointment booked for a COVID-19 vaccination during this time. Can I still attend?

No – you are not permitted to leave quarantine or a self-quarantine premises to attend a COVID-19 vaccination appointment. If you have an appointment booked during this period, please reschedule your appointment by:

- Logging into VaccinateWA for appointments at a state-run vaccination clinic or calling 13 COVID (13 26843), or
- Contacting your GP or primary-care provider for appointments at participating GPs, pharmacies and respiratory clinics.

What should I do if I am identified as a close contact of 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.

For more information go to <https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus>

I have a person at home in self-quarantine/self-isolation what do I do with their linen?

- The person in self-quarantine should handle their own laundry wherever possible.
- Used/soiled linen, blankets or clothing should be placed either:
 - into a plastic bag which is then emptied directly into the washing machine and the bag discarded into general waste, or

- into a plastic laundry basket that is emptied directly into the washing machine and then cleaned and disinfected prior to reuse.
- Avoid contact with used/soiled linen by holding items away from the body prior to depositing in the plastic bag or laundry basket.
- Used/soiled linen, blankets or clothing should be washed as usual in laundry detergent for the maximum washing cycle at the hottest applicable temperature.
- Wipe down the washing machine buttons and dials with a cleaning and disinfecting agent
- Perform hand hygiene after handling the laundry.

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.

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.
- register your contact details when entering a relevant venue (including the SafeWA app).
- get vaccinated.

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?

Under certain circumstances, wearing a mask may be mandatory in WA. It is important to follow the most current advice on the requirements for wearing a face mask. Visit [HealthyWA](#) for the most up to date information.

What sort of mask should I wear and how do I wear one safely?

WA Health recommends wearing single use surgical face masks or fitted reusable fabric masks. Bandanas or scarves should not be used as a face mask substitute. For more information on

appropriate masks and how to use them safely, please visit our [face mask web page](#).

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.

Why is the Western Australian Government testing wastewater?

Visit the Department of Health website for more information on [wastewater testing in Western Australia](#).

How do I report a business or venue that is not maintaining a contact register?

Within local government, environmental health officers have been authorised to inspect premises within their jurisdiction to monitor compliance with contact register requirements. If you are concerned a business is not complying with the mandatory requirements, you should contact [the relevant local government](#) in the first instance.

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

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