

## Understanding COVID-19

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can make humans and animals sick. They cause illnesses that can range from the common cold to more severe diseases.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China. Other coronaviruses include Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

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

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has indicated the symptoms are similar to other respiratory diseases, including the common cold and the flu. Symptoms may vary and include:

- ◆ Feeling tired
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ A fever or high temperature
- ◆ A sore throat
- ◆ A cough

### How is coronavirus spread?

Most infections are only transmitted by people when they have symptoms. The coronavirus is mostly likely to spread from person to person through:

- ◆ Direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- ◆ Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who sneezes or coughs
- ◆ Touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a sneeze or cough from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your face, mouth or eyes

### How can I help to prevent the spread of coronavirus?

The most effective defence is to practice good hygiene through:

- ◆ Washing your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water. This should include before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- ◆ Covering your cough and sneeze with your elbow or a tissue and disposing of tissues carefully
- ◆ Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- ◆ Practice social distancing by staying more than 1.5 metres from others and avoiding handshakes and other close contact forms or greeting

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## What should I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms (fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness or shortness of breath) within 14 days of leaving a country or region that is at higher risk for COVID-19, or within 14 days of last contact of a confirmed case, you should arrange to see your doctor for urgent assessment.

You should telephone the health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your travel history or that you may have been in contact with a potential case of coronavirus. You must remain isolated either in your home or a healthcare setting until public health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

## 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 (e.g. cancer)
- ◆ elderly people
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as they have higher rates of chronic illness
- ◆ people with diagnosed chronic medical conditions
- ◆ very young children and babies\*
- ◆ people in close living situations such as group residential settings

\* At this stage the risk to children and babies, and the role children play in the transmission of COVID-19, is not clear. There has so far been a low rate of confirmed cases among children, relative to the broader population.

## A few helpful strategies

- ◆ **Follow the health advice tips provided by relevant authorities** – remember that washing our hands properly and often is the most effective way to minimise the spread
- ◆ **Stick to the facts** – rather than reading every article on the issue, read only the information communicated by public health agencies and health professionals
- ◆ **Practice stress management techniques** – listening to music, breathing exercises and meditation may help you to minimise anxiety about the events around you
- ◆ **Keep your perspective** – during times such as this misinformation can amplify quickly. Remember there is a concerted effort globally underway to contain the virus