What is coronavirus?
Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans.
COVID-19 is a new virus that can cause an infection in people, including a severe respiratory illness.
The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

How is coronavirus spread?
COVID-19 spreads through close contact with an infected person; mostly face-to-face or within a household. It cannot jump across a room or be carried for long distances in the air so we should all go about our lives as normal.

What is close contact?
Close contact means greater than 15 minutes face-to-face or the sharing of a closed space for more than two hours with a confirmed case.
A close contact could include any person meeting any of the following criteria:
- living in the same household or household-like setting (for example, a boarding school or hostel)
- direct contact with the body fluids or laboratory specimens of a confirmed case
- a person who spent two hours or longer in the same room
- face-to-face contact for more than 15 minutes with the case in any other setting not listed above.

What are the symptoms of coronavirus?
Many people who contract COVID–19 will suffer only mild symptoms. However early indications are that the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions are more at risk of experiencing severe symptoms.
The most common coronavirus symptoms reported include:
- Fever
- Breathing difficulties such as breathlessness
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue or tiredness.

Who is most at risk of coronavirus?
Anyone who has been overseas in the past 14 days or is a close or casual contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 is at the highest risk of infection.
If you have been overseas in the past 14 days you must:
- stay at home (self-quarantine)
- avoid public settings - this means you should not attend work, school, childcare or university or go to other public places such as restaurants, cinemas or shopping centres and should not use public transport or taxis
- do this for 14 days after arriving in Australia (other than when seeking medical care)
- only people who usually live in the household should be in the home. Do not allow visitors into the home.
- you should stay in a different room to other people as much as possible.

Had close contact with a confirmed case
If you have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, stay at home (self-quarantine).

Elderly or have pre-existing medical conditions
Many people will suffer only mild symptoms, however, early indications are that the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart and lung disease are more at risk of

experiencing severe symptoms. Read the [Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) factsheet for people aged over 65 years (Word)](#) for more information.

What if I have travelled overseas?

If you have returned from international travel after midnight 15 March 2020 and begin to feel unwell and develop a fever or shortness of breath, a cough or respiratory illness, you should call the dedicated hotline on 1800 675 398 for advice. This number is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I am feeling unwell, what should I do?

If you are in any of these risk categories and begin to feel unwell and develop a fever or shortness of breath, a cough or respiratory illness either during your period of isolation (self-quarantine), or in the 14 days since arriving home from international travel, you should seek immediate medical attention.

Call ahead to your GP or emergency department and mention your overseas travel before you arrive at the doctor's office so they can prepare appropriate infection control measures.

You can use our [self-assessment tool](#) to help you decide if you should be tested.

If you have serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, call 000 and ask for an ambulance and tell the operator your recent travel history.

Where are the coronavirus assessment centres?

Assessment centres have been established at 12 Melbourne hospitals. You don't need to call ahead if you attend one of the following clinics:

- The Alfred Hospital
- Albury Wodonga
- Austin Hospital
- Barwon Health – Geelong
- Box Hill Hospital
- Monash Clayton
- Northern Hospital.
- Peninsula Health – Frankston
- The Royal Melbourne Hospital
- St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
- Sunshine Hospital
- Wonthaggi Hospital
- Ballarat Base Hospital.

Patients who have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 may present to these assessment centres. We continue to work with our Commonwealth colleagues to approve in-hospital testing for COVID-19.

What can I do to reduce my risk of coronavirus infection?

- Wash hands often with soap and running water, for at least 20 seconds. Dry with paper towel or hand dryer.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow.
- Stay at home if you feel sick. If you take medication make sure you have enough.
- Phone your doctor or the hotline – 1800 675 398 – if you need medical attention. They will tell you what to do.
- Continue healthy habits: exercise, drink water, get plenty of sleep.
- Wearing a face mask is not necessary if you are well.

- Buy an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with over 60 per cent alcohol.

How should I be prepared for the coronavirus outbreak?
Everyone should now take steps to prepare for the possibility of transmission of coronavirus in Victoria in the coming weeks or months.
Make a plan on how you and your family (including pets) would have to manage if you needed to stay at home for 2 to 3 weeks. There are certain supplies you may need if you and your family are self-isolating or quarantined at home. Things like non-perishable food items, soap, toilet paper, tissues, feminine care products, nappies and pet food. Fill prescriptions of essential medicines so you have enough if you need to stay home.
Think about elderly friends, neighbours, and people with a disability in your community and how you would support each other too

How do I avoid catching COVID-19?
The best way to avoid infection is to avoid contact with someone with COVID-19, and to not travel to a high-risk country.
As with other communicable diseases, people with symptoms should stay at home, except to get medical care, and avoid using public transport.

Everyone should practise good hand and cough hygiene:
- wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser (e.g. before and after eating, and after going to the toilet)
- cover your cough with (or sneeze into) a tissue and dispose of it straight away; wash your hands afterwards
- cough or sneeze into your (flexed) elbow
- cough away from other people
- stay more than 1.5 metres away from people when out in public, if possible

Avoid touching your face and mouth while out in public. Avoid touching, kissing and hugging others, if possible, particularly if they are sick.

How does COVID-19 spread from human to human?
The virus is most likely to spread from person to person:
- through direct contact with a person while they are infectious
- through contact with droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- through touching objects or surfaces, such as door handles or tables, then touching your face or mouth (where an infected person has coughed or sneezed and contaminated the surface with droplets)

What is 'social distancing'?
'Social distancing' helps reduce the risk of a virus being transmitted.
Social distancing includes:
- avoiding crowds and mass gatherings where it is hard to keep a reasonable distance from others (about 1.5 metres)
- avoiding small gatherings in enclosed spaces
- trying to keep 1.5 metres between you and other people where possible (for example, when out and about in a public place)
- avoiding shaking hands, hugging or kissing
- avoiding visiting vulnerable people, such as those in aged care facilities or hospitals, babies or people with weakened immune systems

The Australian Government is advising that organised and non-essential gatherings should be limited to 500 people. Non-essential meetings or conferences of critical workforces, such as healthcare professionals and emergency services, should also be limited.

If you are concerned please call the Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398.