



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, which emerged out of Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China.

Visit the [Ministry of Health](#) or [World Health Organization website for more on novel coronavirus](#).

www.health.govt.nz/coronavirus

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, coughing and difficulty breathing. Difficulty breathing is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention.

Are there currently cases in New Zealand?

There has been a single confirmed case in New Zealand. The risk of an ongoing outbreak in New Zealand is low-moderate, but the Ministry of Health is monitoring the situation closely.

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:

- Avoid close contact with people suffering acute respiratory infections
- Frequently wash hands, especially after contact with ill people or their environment
- Avoid close contact with sick live farm animals or wild animals
- People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette:
 - Maintain distance from others (one metre or more)
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or cough/sneeze into your elbow
 - Wash hands

If you are planning on travelling overseas, and are worried you may be going to an area affected by the virus, check the government's [safetravel.govt.nz website](http://safetravel.govt.nz) for the latest travel advisories before you go.

As always, travellers who become sick within a month of their arrival in New Zealand are encouraged to seek medical advice by phoning Healthline (0800 611 116) or seeing a doctor. If you have **health-related concerns specifically about coronavirus, call the dedicated 0800 number: 0800 358 5453 (or +64 9 358 5453 for international SIMs)**. The line is staffed by nurses, paramedics and health advisors. Interpreters are available. It



is important to mention recent travel to areas affected by COVID-19 and/or any known contact with someone diagnosed with the virus.

Should I wear a mask?

For **most people**, personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks is not recommended, as there is limited evidence that the use of face masks prevents transmission of disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that there may be benefit in wearing a face mask to reduce the spread of infection from people **with symptoms** of an acute respiratory infection, but not the general population unless there is a severe epidemic. Personal protective equipment such as masks should also be used alongside respiratory and hand hygiene measures (see above) to prevent the spread of infection.

The World Health Organisation'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 be found [here](#).

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 in, or transited through, mainland China or Iran. I'm in self-isolation but feel fine and have no symptoms. Can I return to work if I get cleared by my doctor?

Anyone arriving in New Zealand who has been in, or transited through, mainland China or Iran will be expected to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. You should also register your details with Healthline within 24 hours of arriving in New Zealand - do this by ringing: 0800 358 5453 (+64 9 358 5453 if using an international SIM).

If you have been exposed to a confirmed case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), you will also be expected to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days.

The 14 day period will **start from the time you leave mainland China or Iran, or were exposed to the person confirmed as having novel coronavirus.**

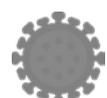
The [self-isolation](#) period is set at 14 days as it may take up to two weeks to start showing symptoms of infection.

Your doctor cannot provide you clearance to return to work. For more information, visit the government's [Employment New Zealand website](#).

I've recently been in China or Iran 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?

Anyone arriving in New Zealand who has been in, or transited through, mainland China or Iran will be expected to self-isolate for a period of **14 days from the time you left mainland China or Iran**. You should also register your details with Healthline (0800 358 5453) within 24 hours of arriving in New Zealand (see above).

If you have been exposed to a confirmed case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), you will also be expected to [self-isolate](#) for **14 days from the time you were exposed to the confirmed case**, and to register with Healthline.



You do not need to supply a medical certificate to your employer. If asked, you can supply the relevant travel documents detailing your travel dates and destinations to prove your need to self-isolate. For more information, visit the government's [Employment New Zealand website](#).

I've recently completed 14 days of self-isolation after returning from mainland China or Iran. I can now return to work but my employer says I can't come back until I get cleared by a doctor. Is that true?

No. As long as you have remained in self-isolation for 14 days after:

- Leaving mainland China or Iran, and/or
- Being exposed to someone confirmed as having COVID-19

And

- You are not experiencing any symptoms of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Then you can return to work. No medical clearance is needed. You may wish to supply the relevant travel documents to your employer, detailing your travel dates and destinations. This will help to clarify the time you were required to self-isolate, and the end of the 14-day period.

For more information, visit the government's [Employment New Zealand website](#).

The Ministry of Health has advised there are rising COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand. Is it still safe to travel to these countries? Will I need to self-isolate when I arrive back in New Zealand?

If you are planning on travelling overseas, and are worried you may be going to an area affected by the virus, check the government's [safetravel.govt.nz website](#) for the latest travel advisories before you go.

There are currently no border restrictions on people travelling back to New Zealand from these areas and, if you have travelled from one of these countries, you **do not** need to stay at home in self-isolation. But, if you do develop symptoms, you should:

- Ring the free coronavirus number **0800 358 543** for health advice, or
- Call your doctor for advice, letting them know of your travel history. Be sure to ring ahead – don't just turn up.

Can coronaviruses be transmitted from person to person?

Yes. COVID-2019 can be spread from person to person via droplet (not airborne) transmission.

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.

Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) – Q&As

Current as at: 02/03/2020

Originally produced by the Auckland Regional Public Health Service



What is the level of risk for New Zealand?

New Zealand has had a single confirmed case of COVID-19 to date, but the risk of an ongoing outbreak currently remains moderate-low. See the [Ministry of Health website for more information](#).

How is the risk level decided?

Various factors are taken into account, including the number of cases, the speed at which new cases are being identified and other information about the virus, such as how easily it spreads from person to person. Personal risk factors (e.g. age and other illnesses) can also determine how unwell a person becomes.

What is being done to minimise cases in New Zealand?

New Zealand has had a single case of COVID-19 but the likelihood of an ongoing outbreak currently remains moderate-low.

New Zealand's Pandemic Plan has been in operation since early January and a system for early identification and management of cases has been up and running for some time.

The New Zealand Government has also placed temporary entry restrictions on anyone arriving in New Zealand who has come from, or passed through, mainland China or Iran. These restrictions are being reviewed every 48 hours. Details of these measures are available [on the Ministry of Health website](#) and also on the [New Zealand Immigration website](#).

Outside of mainland China and Iran, there are also 'countries or areas of concern' with rising numbers of cases. These are Hong Kong, Japan, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Italy. There are currently no border restrictions on people travelling back to New Zealand from these areas and, if you have travelled from one of these countries, you **do not** need to stay at home in self-isolation. But, if you do develop symptoms:

- Ring the free coronavirus number **0800 358 543** for health advice, or
- Call your doctor for advice, letting them know of your travel history. Be sure to ring ahead – don't just turn up.

Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) is supporting the Ministry's activities in Auckland, with staff meeting passengers off flights arriving from areas of concern.

As always, travellers who become sick within a month of their arrival in New Zealand are encouraged to seek medical advice by phoning Healthline (0800 611 116) or seeing a doctor. If you have **health-related concerns specifically about coronavirus, call the dedicated 0800 number: 0800 358 5453 (or +64 9 358 5453 for international SIMs)**. The line is staffed by nurses, paramedics and health advisors. Interpreters are available. It is important to mention recent travel to areas affected by COVID-19 and/or any known contact with someone diagnosed with the virus.

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 two and 14 days.

What is being done to manage the number of international students who will be returning to New Zealand soon?

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

What advice is there for schools and Early Learning Services?

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

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Is there testing available for COVID-19?

Yes. New Zealand laboratories are able to test for the novel coronavirus. The Ministry is working closely alongside DHBs and Public Health Units around the country and will be kept up to date on any suspected cases.

Can I pay for private COVID-19 lab testing?

Laboratory testing for COVID-19 is available in New Zealand. Currently, it can only be requested by medical staff who have assessed a patient and found they meet the specific, clinical criteria for suspected novel coronavirus. A number of COVID-19's symptoms are similar to other respiratory illnesses, so clinical assessment is important to avoid unnecessary testing.

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 will be travelling overseas soon and am worried about the novel coronavirus COVID-19. What precautions should I take?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (MFAT) travel advisories recommend that New Zealanders do not travel to any part of mainland China, and avoid non-essential travel to Iran.

Outside of mainland China and Iran, there are also 'countries or areas of concern' with rising numbers of cases. These are Hong Kong, Japan, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Italy. There are currently no border restrictions on people travelling back to New Zealand from these areas and, if you have travelled from one of these countries, you **do not** need to stay at home in self-isolation. But, if you do develop symptoms:

- Ring the free coronavirus number **0800 358 543** for health advice, or
- Call your doctor for advice, letting them know of your travel history. Be sure to ring ahead – don't just turn up.

If you are travelling overseas, please take the following steps to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections:

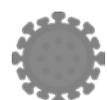
- avoid close contact with people suffering acute respiratory infections
- wash hands for at least 20 seconds with water and soap and dry them thoroughly:
 - before eating or handling food
 - after using the toilet
 - after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or wiping children's noses
 - after caring for sick people
- avoid close contact with sick farm animals or wild animals.

People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice good cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or elbow and wash hands).

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Is Auckland prepared for cases of COVID-19 novel coronavirus?

The Auckland region's three District Health Boards, their hospitals, and Auckland Regional Public Health Service have infection prevention and control measures for staff, patients, and the public. These **are** employed as appropriate. 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.

I've recently travelled to China or Iran. Am I at risk? What should I do?

If you have been in, or transited through, mainland China or Iran in the last 14 days – or had close contact with someone diagnosed with novel coronavirus (COVID-19) - you may have been exposed and infected with the virus.

In some people, it may take up to two weeks before they start showing signs of being sick (if they have been infected). So New Zealand's Ministry of Health is asking you to [isolate yourself](#) from other people for 14 days from the time you left mainland China or were exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19. You should also register your details with Healthline by calling: 0800 358 5453 (or +64 9 358 5453 for international SIMs).

[Information on how to self-isolate](#) is available on the Ministry of Health website.

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- Ring the free coronavirus number **0800 358 543** for health advice, or
- Call your doctor for advice, letting them know of your travel history. Be sure to ring ahead – don't just turn up.

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

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.

In some people, it may take up to two weeks before they start showing signs of being sick (if they have been infected). So New Zealand's Ministry of Health is asking you to [isolate yourself](#) from other people for 14 days from the last time you had contact with the infected person. You should also register your details with Healthline by calling: 0800 358 5453 (or +64 9 358 5453 for international SIMs).

[Information on how to self-isolate](#) is available on the Ministry of Health website.

Are health workers at greater risk?

Health care workers come into contact with patients more often than the general public. 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.

Should I avoid large public events? Will they help spread the virus? Should they be cancelled?

At this stage, the Ministry of Health does not propose altering arrangements for public events.

The Ministry advice is that if you are an event organiser, you should focus on reminding the public not to attend if they are feeling unwell and ensure your emergency management plan is up-to-date.

You should also remind event staff to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene, and prominently display posters explaining the measures to take near toilets and food preparation areas. Ministry of Health posters are available to download in [English](#) and [Simplified Chinese](#) from their website.

Anyone scheduled to work at or attend a public event should stay home if they feel unwell.

More information? Visit the following websites:

- [Ministry of Health](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Auckland Regional Public Health Service](#)

