

# COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) questions and answers

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## What is COVID-19 (novel coronavirus)?

Recently, an outbreak of a new coronavirus disease now called COVID-19 (sometimes called novel coronavirus or 2019-nCoV) was identified. Coronaviruses are a large and diverse family of viruses which cause illnesses such as the common cold. The most recent diseases caused by coronaviruses include [severe acute respiratory syndrome \(SARS\)](#) and [Middle East respiratory syndrome \(MERS\)](#).

On 7 January 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed the identification of a new type of coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2, formerly known as 2019-nCoV). SARS-CoV-2 has not previously been detected in humans or animals. Laboratory testing ruled out other respiratory pathogens such as influenza, avian influenza, adenovirus, and the SARS and MERS coronaviruses.

## Where did COVID-19 come from?

COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It has since been reported in other provinces and in other countries. The latest information on this is available on the [World Health Organization website](#).

We don't know yet how COVID-19 is transmitted to people, but it's likely that it comes from an animal. A live animal market called the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan City is suspected as the original source of COVID-19, but this has not been confirmed. Many initial cases involved people who worked at or were handlers and frequent visitors to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market has been temporarily closed to carry out environmental sanitation and disinfection.

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

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to a range of other illnesses such as influenza and do not necessarily mean that you have COVID-19. Symptoms include:

- fever
- coughing
- difficulty breathing.

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

If you have these symptoms and have recently been to a [country or area of concern](#), or have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19, please contact Healthline (for free) on [0800 358 5453](#) (or [+64 9 358 5453](#) for international SIMs) or your doctor immediately.

## How does COVID-19 spread?

Like the flu, COVID-19 can be transmitted from person to person. The scientific evidence confirms that COVID-19 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.

## How do I protect myself and others from COVID-19?

You should always practice good hygiene by:

- covering coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues
- washing hands for at least 20 seconds with water and soap and drying 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.

People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice good cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues, and wash hands). If you have concerns, you can contact the dedicated COVID-19 Healthline for free on [0800 358 5453](#).

## What should I do if I am immune-compromised or have immune-compromised children or whānau?

People with underlying medical conditions, such as a compromised immune system, liver disease, cancer, kidney disease, heart disease and diabetes mellitus, need to take more precautions to protect themselves against all infections, including COVID-19.

While New Zealand currently has very few cases of COVID-19 and no evidence of sustained person-to-person transmission in our communities, we recommend people take the following simple steps to protect yourself and others:

- Avoid close contact with people with cold or flu-like illnesses.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing.
- 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.

Additional measures that you and your whānau and friends can take include:

- If you are immune-compromised, avoid staying with a person who is self-isolating (because they are a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 or have recently travelled to a [country or area of concern](#).)
- You should stay at least a metre away from people who are unwell, if you are immune-compromised.
- It's also important that everyone helps to protect the safety of immunocompromised people living in our community. For example, if you're unwell, avoid contact with someone who is immune-compromised.
- We recommend checking [safe travel advice](#) about COVID-19 if you plan overseas travel.
- At this time, it wouldn't make sense for someone who is immune-compromised to wear a mask when in public to decrease risk for catching COVID-19. However, if your health care provider advises you to wear a mask when in public areas because you have a particularly vulnerable immune system, follow that advice.
- If you are taking immunosuppressive drugs we advise that you do not stop this medication without first consulting your GP or specialist.

## Can you test for COVID-19?

Yes, New Zealand laboratories are able to test for COVID-19.

The Ministry is working closely alongside DHBs and public health units around the country and they will keep us up to date of any suspected cases.

## What is the treatment for COVID-19?

Currently, there is no specific treatment for coronavirus, but medical care can treat most of the symptoms.

There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19 as it is a new virus. Researchers are in the early stages of developing one.

## Can we stop the virus from coming into New Zealand?

New Zealand currently has very few cases of COVID-19. We knew the likelihood of an imported case in New Zealand was high, however, the likelihood of a widespread outbreak is low-moderate. Border control checks do not guarantee an absolute protection to New Zealand, because the incubation period is likely to be up to 14 days. This means people may not show any symptoms until 14 days after being exposed to a person with the virus.

## Can I go overseas? Are there any travel restrictions?

Check the [SafeTravel website](#) for the latest advice from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

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
- washing hands for at least 20 seconds with water and soap and drying 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, and wash hands).

MFAT urge all New Zealanders living in, visiting or travelling overseas to [register on SafeTravel](#). Registering means you will receive updated information and advice as soon as it comes to hand.

## I am in another country wanting to come to New Zealand. What should I do?

People who have been in [countries or areas of concern](#) may not be able to enter New Zealand or may be asked to self-isolate for 14 days. Check our [Advice for travellers](#) to find out more.

We recommend checking in with your airline about your travel arrangements, as a number of airlines have suspended flights.

New Zealanders requiring consular assistance should contact their nearest New Zealand representation. See [SafeTravel](#) for full details.

## I am a New Zealander in Hubei province wanting to return to New Zealand. What should I do?

Please see the [SafeTravel website](#) for further information.

## What happens if I start feeling sick during my flight to New Zealand?

Aircrew have training and processes in place to manage any ill passenger on board while also protecting other passengers. In the case of any suspected contagious disease the aircrew will also inform health authorities at the airport where they land.

Health authorities share information on international health risks, such as ill travellers, under international health regulations. This includes suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19. If the Ministry of Health is informed of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, we notify local public health officers and activate our ill traveller responses.

Any close contacts of a confirmed case will be advised and given information about the disease, self-isolation, taking their temperature daily and reporting symptoms.

## **What do I do if I get sick while in New Zealand?**

If you are sick after arriving into New Zealand telephone Healthline (for free) on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453) (or [+64 9 358 5453](tel:+6493585453) for international SIMs) and explain that you have just arrived in New Zealand from overseas. You should also:

- avoid close contact with people (stay at least one metre away)
- wash hands frequently, especially before contact with people, before eating, after coughing or sneezing
- practice good cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues, and wash hands).

## **When did the World Health Organisation (WHO) declare COVID-19 as a public health emergency?**

On January 31 2020 the third meeting of the ad hoc Emergency Committee (the Committee) was convened by WHO on the basis of the Committee's advice, regarding the outbreak of COVID-19. The WHO Director-General has declared the outbreak constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).

New Zealand's current and planned preparedness and response activities for COVID-19 are all consistent with the advice from WHO. It is important to note that as the situation continues to evolve, so will the strategic goals and measures to prevent and reduce spread of the infection.

## **What is New Zealand doing about COVID-19? What measures are being taken to protect New Zealanders?**

We knew the likelihood of an imported case in New Zealand is high, however, the likelihood of an ongoing outbreak remains low–moderate.

The Ministry is already taking a precautionary approach to this outbreak. We are well prepared and have our system for early identification and case management up and running.

## **Should I be concerned about COVID-19?**

New Zealand currently has very few cases of COVID-19 and no evidence of sustained person-to-person transmission in our communities. The likelihood of an ongoing outbreak remains low–moderate.

The Ministry of Health is monitoring the situation closely and our health system is prepared and ready to respond. The Ministry of Health maintains preparedness for a pandemic with [an up-to-date Pandemic Plan](#). While this is not an influenza outbreak, the plan is a very useful guide.

Current information shows most people with this virus are not severely ill.

## **I'm feeling stressed, who can I talk to?**

If over the following days and weeks you feel you are not coping, it's important to seek help and professional support. Your family doctor is a good starting point. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can also call or text [1737 Need to talk?](#) This service is free, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and gives you the chance to talk it through with a trained counsellor.

## **I am going to a public event, what should I do?**

At this stage the Ministry does not propose altering arrangements for public events. See [Advice for public events and mass gatherings](#) for more information.

## **Can I go to school or work?**

As always, anyone who is unwell should not be at school or at work.

If you are arriving in New Zealand from overseas, check our [Advice for travellers](#) to find out whether you need to self-isolate.

If you have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case you should self-isolate for 14 days from the date of close contact.

If you develop symptoms including fever, coughing and difficulty breathing you should ring Healthline (for free) on [0800 358 5453](#) (or [+64 9 358 5453](#) for international SIMs) or your doctor.

## **When should I stay home?**

If you feel sick, you should stay at home. If you are experiencing severe symptoms you should contact Healthline as soon as possible (for free) on [0800 358 5453](#) (or [+64 9 358 5453](#) for international SIMs) or your doctor.

## **When should I seek medical advice?**

If you are concerned about any symptoms you are experiencing, please contact Healthline (for free) on [0800 358 5453](#) (or [+64 9 358 5453](#) for international SIMs) or your doctor.

## **What if your COVID-19 test result is negative?**

If your doctor has recently tested you for COVID-19, and the result was negative, here are some important things to remember:

You still need to complete your full 14-day isolation period if:

- You have returned from an area or country of concern, or
- You have had close contact with someone with the virus.

If you are still sick with the same illness at the end of your 14-day isolation period, you will need to stay in isolation until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours. If you are well, and have been well for 24 hours, you can return to normal daily activity.

If your current symptoms get worse and you feel more unwell, free-phone Healthline for advice: [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453). If you need to see a doctor for this new illness, please phone ahead (don't just turn up). Be sure to let them know you've recently returned from an area of concern or had close contact with a person confirmed as having COVID-19.

If you are feeling fully recovered from your illness, but then develop a new illness while in self-isolation, please call Healthline on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453) or see your doctor (phone ahead and tell them you have been in self-isolation).

Thank you for helping to protect the health and wellbeing of yourself and others.

## **Where can I get further information about COVID-19?**

Up-to-date information is available at [COVID-19 \(novel coronavirus\)](#).

All information from the WHO pertaining to COVID-19 can be found via the following links: