Information for healthcare and residential care workers

People who have returned from anywhere overseas, or have been in close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, are required to self-isolate for 14 days. If you develop symptoms, including a fever and cough, you should immediately and urgently seek medical attention.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets found at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources

Can I go to work?

Like others, health and aged care staff need to stay at home for 14 days after returning from overseas or being in close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19. Employees who are in isolation cannot go to work and should alert their employer. Depending on the type of work, and provided the employee is well, they may want to discuss alternative arrangements such as working from home. See the 'Isolation guidance' information sheets at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources

In addition, residential aged care staff will not be allowed to attend work if they have a fever, symptoms of a respiratory illness, or are not vaccinated against influenza.

From 1 May, you must have your influenza vaccination to work in or visit an aged care facility.

To support the aged care workforce, the Government is relaxing international student visa work conditions for aged care facilities and home care providers. This will allow international student nurses and other aged care workers to work more than the 40 hours a fortnight. There are currently around 20,000 international student nurses studying in Australia.

What should I tell my staff?

Employers should provide information and brief all employees and contract staff, including domestic and cleaning staff where applicable, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Employers should inform staff who meet the above criteria that they should remain isolated in their home. Employees should advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period, particularly if they have been in the workplace. Public health authorities may contact employers in the event an employee is confirmed to have coronavirus.

In addition, to protect our most vulnerable community members, staff of residential aged care services will be asked to provide details on their health status before entering the service.

What precautions should I take when cleaning?

When cleaning, staff should minimise the risk of being infected with coronavirus by wearing gloves and using alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves. If cleaning rooms or areas of the workplace that have been frequented by a person with a confirmed case of coronavirus or a person in isolation, staff may want to wear a surgical mask as an added precaution. If a confirmed case of coronavirus or a person in isolation is in a room that cleaning staff need to enter, staff may ask them to put on a surgical mask if they have one available.

Can food and water spread coronavirus?

Some coronaviruses can potentially survive in the gastrointestinal tract, however, food-borne spread is unlikely when food is properly cooked and prepared. With good food preparation and good hand hygiene, it is highly unlikely that you will become infected with coronavirus through food.

It is unknown at this time if the virus is able to survive in sewerage. People who work closely with sewerage should take the same precautions as outlined above for cleaners. Drinking water in Australia is high quality and is well treated. It is not anticipated that drinking water will be affected by coronavirus.

How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene and keeping your distance from others when you are sick is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, including before and after eating, and after going to the toilet.
- Cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and wash your hands.
- Avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people).
- Exercise personal responsibility for social distancing measures.

More information

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not coronavirus.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.