

Information for people who have had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

18 March 2020

This information is being provided to you because you have been identified as having had close contact with someone who has been confirmed as having COVID-19 (novel coronavirus).

There is a possibility that the illness could have been passed on to you.

This fact sheet explains what you can expect from the public health unit and provides some basic information on COVID-19 and precautions you can take to keep yourself and your loved ones safe. The public health unit will keep in touch with you and provide you with regular updates.

It is important to note that most people who have had close contact with someone confirmed as having the novel coronavirus have not been infected or become ill.

What is a close contact?

A case is considered as potentially infectious 48 hours prior to developing symptoms, while symptomatic, and until symptom-free for 48 hours. A close contact is anyone who has had one of the following contacts with a case while the case is infectious:

- living in the same household or household-like setting (eg, in a hostel) as a COVID-19 case
- having spent two hours or longer in the same room, bus or train as a COVID-19 case
- having been seated within two rows either side of a COVID-19 case on a flight for two hours or longer
- having been face-to-face within two metres or less of the case for more than 15 minutes in any other setting not listed above

What is COVID-19 (novel coronavirus)?

COVID-19 is caused by a virus (more specifically, a coronavirus) that affects the respiratory system (lungs and breathing tubes).

Health officials first reported the disease in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, on 31 December 2019. It has since been reported in other provinces and in many other countries. The latest information on this is available on the World Health Organization website: [who.int](https://www.who.int)

How serious is it?

We think there are many people with mild or moderate symptoms, but some people can become seriously ill and require treatment in hospital. Most of the people who have died after contracting COVID-19 had pre-existing health conditions.

Those most at risk of becoming seriously unwell are those with weakened immune systems, older people and those with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

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

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

How is it spread?

Understanding of the virus and the disease it causes continues to evolve.

COVID-19 can be spread through person-to-person contact. The virus is thought to spread through touching infected surfaces and from an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as through coughing. However, the precise ways the virus spreads are not currently well understood.

Infected people have spread COVID-19 to others in health care settings, such as hospitals, when appropriate infection prevention and control measures have not been applied. **Most people who have had close contact with someone confirmed as having COVID-19 have not been infected or become ill.**

What are the symptoms?

Most people confirmed to have COVID-19 display the symptoms of pneumonia:

- fever (at least 38°C)
- cough
- shortness of breath.

However, infections with mild symptoms (such as cold-like symptoms) or no symptoms at all are likely, though to what extent they occur is not yet known.

What do I need to do?

As you have been identified as having contact with a person suspected of having COVID-19, it is important that you are monitored, so that any early symptoms can be detected.

You will need to self-isolate for 14 days and avoid social gatherings and events where people come into contact with you in particular, child care/pre-school centres, primary and secondary schools (including staff and students), aged care, health care facilities, prisons, public gatherings. See the information on self-isolation.

Could I be infectious?

There are simple, everyday measures you can take to help protect yourself and others from respiratory illnesses.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry them for 20 seconds – or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze – then put the tissue in a lined bin.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid personal contact, such as kissing, or sharing cups or eating utensils, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs.

How can I find out more?

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your local public health unit or call the dedicated Healthline coronavirus free-phone 0800 358 5453.

You can find out more about COVID-19 on the Ministry of Health website: health.govt.nz/covid-19