

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

DHHS key messages

30 March 2020 as at 1845hrs

How we can all save lives

- Stay home whenever possible - if you don't need to do it, don't do it.
- People aged over 70, aged over 60 with pre-existing conditions, or Indigenous people aged over 50 should stay home wherever possible for their own protection.
- Younger Victorians are not immune to coronavirus.
- There are now confirmed cases of community transmission – it's not just from overseas travellers.
- Coronavirus spreads through close contact with an infected person, mostly face-to-face or within a household.
- Physical distancing will help reduce new cases of coronavirus.
- These measures aim to slow the spread and 'flatten the curve' or minimise the peak of an outbreak.
- We can't stop the virus, but we can work together to help limit its damage.
- We continue to work around the clock with health services, the Commonwealth and international agencies to respond to this threat and to keep the Victorian community safe.
- Victoria has been working on its pandemic response for some weeks.
- Victoria has long-developed plans in place to manage and control the risks of new infectious diseases like coronavirus.

State of Emergency

- A State of Emergency has been declared in Victoria coronavirus (COVID-19) until midnight on 13 April 2020 to combat coronavirus.
- This gives the Chief Health Officer powers to do whatever is necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

Current Restrictions

- Everyone should stay home.
- You can leave your home to:
 - to shop for essentials including groceries
 - to receive medical care
 - for compassionate reasons including dropping food or medicines to others
 - to exercise
 - For work and education, only if remote work or education isn't possible.
- Restrictions are in place to stop people gathering in large numbers and spreading infection.
- You should strictly limit your day-to-day activities outside your home. If you don't need to do it, don't do it.
- For indoor gatherings, no more than one person per four square metres of floor space. For example, there can be 25 people in a 100 square metre room, with a physical distance between each other of 1.5 metres.
- Public gatherings, excluding household members, have been reduced to a maximum of two people.
- Pubs, licensed clubs and hotels (excluding accommodation), gyms, skateparks, indoor sporting venues, cinemas, beauty salons, play centres and outside playgrounds, places of worship and other public places must be closed.
- Businesses that have put in place 'phone ahead', pick up or deliver services, including takeaway food, can continue as long as the rules around physical distancing are maintained.

- There are restrictions on attendance at weddings, funerals and outdoor fitness classes.
- Supermarkets and pharmacies remain open, with public transport to continue operating.
- We are working with Victoria Police to monitor compliance with these mandatory directions
- If you would like further information about the restrictions in place, please visit the coronavirus website www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au

New rules for overseas arrivals

- Two thirds of confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases to date are a result of transmission from overseas arrivals to their close contacts.
- All travellers arriving into Australia from overseas will now be placed in quarantine for 14-days to slow the spread of coronavirus.
- Returning travellers will be housed in hotels, motels, caravan parks, and student accommodation.
- States and territories will enforce the 14-day quarantine period with support from the Commonwealth and Australian Defence Force (ADF).
- The costs of accommodation, public health and security will be covered by each individual jurisdiction.
- Those in quarantine will receive care packages of food and other essentials during this time.
- Travellers returning from overseas will be housed in the state or territory they initially arrive in for 14 days.
- Victoria currently has 5,000 hotel beds available for travellers returning from overseas.
- Each newly returned traveller in compulsory quarantine in a hotel will receive a care package of food and other essentials.
- Skybus is supplying 85 buses to transfer people arriving at the airport to their accommodation.
- Note: all international passengers that arrived at a Victorian airport prior to 28 March 2020 must self-quarantine for 14 days.

Travel advice and restrictions

- Australian citizens and Australian permanent residents are now restricted from travelling overseas.
- Australians who are already overseas and wish to return home are advised to return as soon as possible.
- People are urged to cancel all non-essential international and domestic travel.
- Victorians should limit their movements and cancel planned domestic school holiday travel and activities.
- The situation is changing rapidly – visit Smart Traveller for the latest updates. <https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/>

Spot fines

- On-the-spot fines have been introduced for Victorians and Victorian businesses that are found to be in breach of physical distancing and quarantine requirements including:
 - Those international travellers that arrived in Victoria before 28 March 2020 and fail to self-isolate for 14 days
 - If they organise or attend a mass gathering prohibited by the Prohibited Gatherings Direction
 - If they organise or attend a wedding that has more than five people, including the two persons being married, the celebrant, and two witnesses, or a funeral that has more than 10 persons, as prohibited by the Prohibited Gatherings Direction
 - If they organise an auction for the sale of a residential property, as prohibited by the Non-Essential Activity Direction.
- Victoria Police can issue individuals with on-the-spot fines of up to \$1,652 and up to \$9,913 for Victorian businesses found to be in breach of the social distancing and quarantine requirements.

Hospital and aged-care restrictions

- Emergency powers under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 have been enacted to limit visits to patients in hospitals to partners, parents or guardians or care and support people.
- And the following people are not allowed to visit a hospital:
 - recently returned travellers

- a person who has a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- a person who has been in contact with a person who has a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) or
- a person with a high-temperature or symptoms of acute respiratory illness.
- Visits to residents of aged care facilities are now restricted to two people per day for a short duration. Exceptions to this rule will be made for people receiving palliative care.
- Children under the age of 16 will only be permitted to visit aged care facilities in exceptional circumstances.
- These directions will be enforced by the Commonwealth Government.

Supporting healthcare workers

- It's everyone's responsibility to support essential healthcare workers – such as doctors and nurses – to stay at work during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- Healthcare workers may need extra help to ensure their children have care so they can work during this period.
- Where possible, partners of essential healthcare workers – who are not healthcare workers themselves – should support them to continue working by taking care of children.
- Older people – such as grandparents – and other at-risk groups should not be engaged as carers to reduce their risk of infection.

Health workforce response – expressions of interest

- Clinical and non-clinical healthcare workers are being asked to express their interest in working within the Victorian health system as part of the response to coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Visit <https://healthworkforceresponse.dhhs.vic.gov.au/> for more information.

Support for family violence

- With more people staying at home to reduce the community spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), there may be an increased risk for victim survivors experiencing family violence.
- Services are still operating to help women and children in family violence situations, including crisis accommodation.
- If you or someone you know is at risk or experiencing family violence call 000 in an emergency or safe steps 24/7 crisis service on 1800 015 188.

Gambling and drinking responsibly

- Gambling and drinking large amounts of alcohol can be an escape for people who have experienced a stressful change in life, such as the unprecedented changes in society we are all experiencing due to coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Excessive alcohol consumption is harmful for your health and can weaken your immune system, making you more susceptible to pneumonia, acute respiratory stress syndromes (ARDS), and sepsis.
- If you drink alcohol, please drink responsibly by following the Australian Guidelines which recommend healthy adults drink no more than 2 standard drinks on any day.
- When people turn to gambling at vulnerable times in their lives, and it becomes a way for them to cope, it can lead to gambling problems.
- Responsible gambling means understanding the odds, knowing how much time or money to spend and when to stop. If you gamble you should expect to lose.
- Gambling should be budgeted as an expense, just like going out for dinner, and not considered a way to make money.
- If you need support or would like to speak to someone about your gambling please visit: <https://gamblershelp.com.au/> or phone [1800 858 858](tel:1800858858)

A warning for completing home improvement projects around the house

- While it is important to keep busy and active at home, Victorians are urged not to undertake building or repair works around their home where they do not have the required skills or experience.
- If you do not have the required skills or experience, always use a professional to safely complete all repairs and renovations around the house.
- To find an accredited builder go to: <https://www.vba.vic.gov.au/tools/find-practitioner>

New orders for pharmacists and prescription medications

- During coronavirus (COVID-19), pharmacists can supply prescription medications without a prescription for one month in emergency circumstances except for Schedule 8 medicines.
- Doctors prescribing Schedule 8 medicines for non-drug dependent patients will not be required to apply for a Schedule 8 treatment permit for the next six months, but instead check SafeScript.
- Practitioners will need to apply for Schedule 8 treatment permits for drug dependent patients, including opioid replacement therapy.
- During the pandemic health practitioners should take all reasonable steps to access SafeScript, as it is a very effective in providing up-to-date information about a patient's prescribing and dispensing history.
- Two new public health emergency orders have come into effect and can be found here: <http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2020/GG2020S158.pdf>

Elective surgery

- Victoria's public hospitals have begun winding back all non-urgent surgery where it is safe to do so.
- The Victorian Government is working with public and private hospitals on a system-wide response including how to preserve critical resources for when they will need them most – that means beds, staff and supplies – not just to care for coronavirus patients but to keep looking after all Victorians in need of emergency and urgent care.
- No further category three elective surgeries will take place until further notice, while category two surgeries will only happen if delays would pose a serious risk to the health of the patient.
- The most urgent procedures including emergency surgery, or category one elective surgeries - including those booked in as part of our elective surgery blitz –such as urgent heart, neurological and cancer procedures will not be affected.

Smile Squad

- Victoria's school dental program, Smile Squad, will also be put on hold for three months.

Support available

Coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline

- The Victorian Coronavirus Hotline provides a single point of information for Victorians, where they can access:
 - Health information about coronavirus (COVID-19)
 - A symptoms assessment by the National Coronavirus Information Service (available 24 hours a day).
 - information regarding physical distancing and other actions to reduce transmission (available 8am – 6pm daily)
 - information and registration for emergency [relief packages](#) from the Victorian Government for eligible vulnerable Victorians needing to self-isolate due to coronavirus (available 8am – 6pm). For translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.
- Victoria Police has established a coronavirus enforcement squad of five hundred officers to ensure containment measures that have been put in place to combat coronavirus are followed.
- To alert authorities to potential breaches of directions including mass gatherings and to self-isolate, please contact the [Police Assistance Line](#) (available 24 hours a day).

- For information about coronavirus (COVID-19) in Victoria, and ways to reduce the risk of infection and slow the spread of the virus, visit the Department of Health and Human Services [website](#).

Emergency relief packages

- Vulnerable Victorians who need to self-quarantine due to coronavirus (COVID-19) and do not have access to a support network or alternative means of obtaining supplies such as online delivery.
- All requests will be assessed on need and urgency, prioritising those in greatest need.
- We ask that wherever possible you arrange for family or friends who are not required to self-isolate to get food or necessities for you.
- Each emergency food relief package is designed to provide basic food essentials and personal care items for two weeks.
- Relief packages will be distributed by partner organisations including the Red Cross and Foodbank Victoria

Economic survival package

- The Victorian Government is providing a \$1.7 billion economic survival and jobs package to complement the Federal Government work. This includes:
 - full payroll tax refunds for 2019-20 financial year for small and medium-sized businesses with payroll of less than \$3 million
 - the same businesses will be able to defer any payroll tax for the first three months of 2020-21 financial year until 1 January 2021
 - more than 30,000 eligible small businesses that don't pay payroll tax are now eligible for grants of \$10,000
 - commercial tenants in government buildings can apply for rent relief
 - 2020 land tax payments deferred for eligible small businesses
 - Victorian Government will pay all outstanding supplier invoices within five business days
 - the 2020 liquor licensing fees waived for affected venues and small businesses.
- \$500 million will be provided to establish a Business Support Fund to help the hardest hit sectors, including hospitality, tourism, accommodation, arts and entertainment, and retail.
- A \$500 million Working for Victoria Fund will also be established to help workers who have lost their jobs find new opportunities.
- Payroll tax refunds have been deposited into the bank accounts of 2,700 small businesses and \$1.1 billion has been paid to businesses to fast-track their outstanding supplier invoices.

Homelessness and public housing support

- Victorian homelessness organisations will receive \$6 million to help protect Victorians at risk of or experiencing homelessness because of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Homelessness agencies will have extra resources to find temporary housing for those who need it most in metropolitan and regional areas.
- Alternative pop-up accommodation will also be established for homeless people requiring quarantine or self-isolation in Melbourne.

Moratorium on evictions

- Evictions will be put on hold for six months, with landlords and renters encouraged to talk about short term agreements. More information on this will be provided in the coming days.

Public Transport

- Victoria has already implemented additional cleaning on public transport, and employers are urged to consider staggered work times and remote working arrangements to reduce overcrowding at peak travel times.
- People travelling in taxis or ride shares are advised to sit in the back seat. Elderly people and those with pre-existing medical conditions should avoid public transport.

Schools

- School closed in Victoria on Tuesday 24 March, with the exception of children of essential workers and vulnerable children.
- The decision whether to re-open schools after the Term 1 holidays will be made at a later date.

About coronavirus (COVID-19)

Self-isolation vs Quarantine

- Quarantine is what you should do if you might have coronavirus or if you have had close contact with someone who has coronavirus.
- All international passengers arriving at Victorian airports or disembarking at maritime ports after 28 March must go into enforced quarantine for 14 days from the day of their arrival.
- Self-isolation is what you should do if you have tested positive for coronavirus. This is the next step in ensuring even those you live with are protected. You can be in isolation in a hospital or isolated at home (self-isolation). If you are isolating at home there are steps you need to take to keep the people you live with healthy.
- While most Victorians are voluntarily complying with requests to isolate, police have strong powers to enforce the direction.

Risk of transmission

- There is a low risk of transmission by passing through places where a confirmed case has been, therefore testing in these cases is not required. Testing is only recommended on advice from medical staff for anyone displaying symptoms.
- If you develop a fever or respiratory symptoms you are advised to ring the 24-hour hotline 1800 675 398, or a GP or emergency department to arrange for assessment. If you have returned from overseas or you have had close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus you are required to self-isolate for 14-days. If you develop symptoms in this time you are advised to ring the 24-hour hotline 1800 675 398, or a GP or emergency department to arrange for assessment.
- Self-isolation includes not allowing visitors into your home.
- If you are instructed to self-isolate and you live with others, try and stay in a different room as much as possible.
- You can visit the DHHS website resources on coronavirus and self-assessment guidelines. Guidelines are also available for healthcare and residential care workers at www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Reduce your risk of coronavirus

- Wash your 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.
- Limit your movements within the community.
- 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.

Seriousness of coronavirus

- Experience internationally shows that there is potential for thousands of cases in a population as big as Victoria's.

- Successful control measures adopted by all of us working together to avoid transmission of the virus could delay the peak and significantly reduce the number of sick people.

Additional assessment centres

- To date Respiratory Assessment Centres, or screening clinics, have been established at 27 health services – 12 in metropolitan Melbourne and 15 in Regional Victoria: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>.
- The newest clinic to open is the Sunraysia Community Health Service in Mildura.
- Patients who have symptoms compatible with coronavirus (COVID-19) may present to these centres.

Treatment and vaccine

- There is no specific treatment for coronavirus. However, many of the symptoms can be managed and the length and severity of illness will vary from patient to patient.
- It is not yet clear how long someone is infectious after being unwell, although it is likely to be at least 24 hours after symptoms have resolved.
- Researchers around the world are working to develop a vaccine, however a vaccine may be many months away or longer.

Facemasks

- Face masks are not recommended for use by members of the public for the prevention of infections like coronavirus.

Specific advice for special groups

Advice for healthcare workers

- Any healthcare or aged care workers who develops symptoms should contact their GP or the hotline for advice before returning to work.
- Like other members of the public, if healthcare or aged care workers develop fever or respiratory symptoms during self-isolation they should seek medical attention.

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 may be more at risk of experiencing severe symptoms.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People

- Because of higher rates of pre-existing medical conditions in this group, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who develop fever or respiratory symptoms or fever should be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19).
- The Department of Health and Human Services recognises that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians prefer to be treated at Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- While we recognise that some ACCOs will currently not be able to perform coronavirus (COVID-19) testing, the department is working closely to support ACCOs to fill this important role within the community.
- Anyone who thinks they may have coronavirus (COVID-19) can call the hotline 1800 675 398.

Medical stockpiles and distribution

- The Victorian Government is working with the Australian Government to ensure that all vital personal protective equipment supplies are appropriately distributed to where they are needed across the Victorian health system.

Shortage of swabs

- There is currently a significant shortage of swabs and reagent test kits for coronavirus testing.

- Clinicians have been directed to advise all patients who have clinical symptoms but have not been overseas or in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus to remain home and not attend work, school or any public places until symptoms have completely resolved.

How Victorians can prepare

- There are enough groceries to go around including household staples such as toilet paper, flour, rice, tinned goods, pasta, feminine products, nappies and pet food.
- With this in mind, please don't buy more than you need and be kind to one another in the supermarket aisles, it's important to remain calm during this challenging time.
- 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 two to three weeks.
- 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.
- Get the flu shot that is available from April. This won't stop you getting coronavirus, but will reduce the risk of having it and the flu at the same time.
- Any healthcare or residential aged care worker with a fever or respiratory symptoms should be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19).