

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

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

If the person who is unwell is confirmed as having COVID-19, 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 24 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 as a COVID-19 case
- having been seated within two rows either side of a COVID-19 case on a flight, bus or train for two hours or longer
- having been face-to-face within two metre 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

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 available 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 is continuing 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 close contact with a person suspected of having COVID-19, it is important that you self-isolate and are followed up by health staff, so that any early symptoms can be detected.

You will need to monitor your health until COVID-19 is ruled out in the person being investigated, or until 14 days since your last contact with the suspected case. Monitoring your health involves:

- observing for signs of illness such as a fever and flu like symptoms
- someone from the public health unit will make contact with you each day to check on you and answer any questions you might have.

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