



Information for Emergency Departments

Key Points

An outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in late December 2019.

- Investigate and manage patients for respiratory illness using standard practices.
- For severe respiratory illness, transfer patients to public hospital emergency departments.
- Contact your state/territory public health unit or communicable disease branch for advice on suspected cases including diagnostic testing and specimen collection (contact info below).

Current Situation

- Most people infected with 2019-nCoV live in, or have recently travelled to mainland China. There have also been some cases reported in other countries.
- There is evidence of human-to-human transmission, including among healthcare workers.
- People are considered to be most infectious while symptomatic, however there is limited evidence that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic people are also able to transmit the virus.
- People who have recently returned from mainland China or who have had close contact with a confirmed case are being advised to self-isolate for 14 days.
- People in these circumstances have been advised to call ahead to medical clinics if they require medical attention.

Identify Symptoms and Exposure History

As the full clinical spectrum of illness is not known, **clinical and public health judgement** should also be used to determine the need for testing in patients who **do not** meet the epidemiological or clinical criteria below.

If the patient satisfies the epidemiological AND clinical criteria (listed below), they are classified as a **suspected case**:

Epidemiological criteria

Travel to (including transit through) mainland China in the 14 days before onset of illness.

OR

Close contact* in 14 days before illness onset with a confirmed or suspected case of 2019-nCoV.

Clinical criteria

Acute respiratory infection (respiratory infection with at least one of: shortness of breath, cough or sore throat) with or without fever or history of fever.

* A close contact is defined as requiring:

- Greater than 15 minutes face-to-face contact in any setting with a confirmed case in the period extending from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed case, or
- Sharing of a closed space with a confirmed case for a prolonged period (e.g. more than 2 hours) in the period extending from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed case.

The above criteria are provisional only. They will be revised by public health authorities over time as more precise information emerges on the outbreak including characteristics of transmission, incubation and infectivity period and geographical spread. Updated information will be communicated when available.

Action for Patients who meet criteria

<p><i>Personal Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a surgical mask on the patient upon entry into the Emergency Department. • Place patient in a room, with negative pressure air-handling (if available). • Use standard plus contact plus droplet transmission precautions including a disposable fluid resistant gown, gloves, surgical mask, and eye protection while reviewing the patient • Airborne precautions, i.e. a P2 or equivalent particulate filter respirator and eye protection must also be used while collecting specimens in a negative pressure room if available.
<p><i>Seek Advice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Practitioners referring suspected cases should have already contacted your state/territory public health unit or communicable disease branch. Your emergency department should have been notified if a suspected case is being transferred to your hospital. • If a suspected case self presents to your emergency department, immediately contact your state/territory public health unit or communicable disease branch.
<p><i>Early Supportive Therapy and Monitoring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a patient is in respiratory distress, hypoxaemia or shock. • Immediately give supplemental oxygen and empirical antibiotics. • For patients who are not in distress, provide supportive therapy as needed.
<p><i>Investigations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The local public health unit will provide advice on the exact specimens required for specialised testing to identify whether the patient has novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), the approved collection methods and equipment for collecting specimens and the protocols for handling, storage and transport to correct laboratory. • <i>Collect all three specimen types (not just one or two of the three), i.e., lower respiratory (sputum); upper respiratory (nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swabs); and serum specimens for testing is recommended for specialised testing</i> • Undertake investigations for alternative causes including blood for culture, multiplex PCR for respiratory pathogens, and serum for serology**. <p><i>For patients with confirmed 2019-nCoV infection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitalised patients should have repeated URT and LRT samples collected to demonstrate viral clearance. The frequency of collection will depend on local circumstances under the advice of your Public Health Unit. • A week or two after confirming the diagnosis, convalescent serum should be collected for serology.

** Please refer to the Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) website <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/Publications-13> for further information on routine tests to rule in or out possible alternate causes for the patient's illness.

Additional information

The Department of Health will provide regular updates as more information on this situation becomes available: www.health.gov.au

The Communicable Diseases Network Australia have developed interim recommendations for surveillance, infection control, laboratory testing and contact management for 2019-nCoV: <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm>

The Department of Health has produced a series of factsheets on 2019-nCov that you can share with your patients: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>

For additional information on 2019-nCoV visit the World Health Organization website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Contact your state or territory Public Health Authority for advice on possible cases:

- ACT call 02 5124 9213 during business hours or (02) 9962 4155 after hours
- NSW call 1300 066 055
- NT call 08 8922 8044.
- Qld call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- SA call 1300 232 272
- Tas call 1800 671 738
- Vic call 1300 651 160
- WA call 08 9328 0553 or call your local [public health unit](#)