

Information you need to know about Coronavirus (COVID-19) as at 16/03/2020

The Ministry of Health's current advice is that, with continued vigilance, the chance of widespread community outbreak is expected to remain low.

As of 16 March 08:00am there are 8 confirm cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand. With the virus now officially being declared a global pandemic, many countries and businesses are escalating their Pandemic response plan.

As a business and as individual workers - we all have a role here to minimise the spread of COVID-19. It is important that we understand the virus and specifically how the virus is transmitted -as we do not want misinformation at a time like this.

Therefore we have outlined the known FACTS about COVID-19 (coronavirus) as issued to us from the World Health Organisation (WHO) who worked closely with China during the initial outbreak, and the NZ Ministry of Health.

What are the facts about COVID-19 is:

- At this time the vast majority of people in New Zealand have low risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19
- New Zealand currently has very few cases of COVID-19 and no evidence of sustained person-to-person transmission in our communities
- Although asymptomatic infection (people with no symptoms) has been reported, there is emerging evidence that this is rare and not a major driver in spreading the infection
- Spread happens through coughing and sneezing by someone confirmed with COVID-19 – similar to the way that influenza spreads,
 - *“COVID-19 does not transmit as efficiently as influenza, from the data we have so far. With influenza, people who are infected but not yet sick are major drivers of transmission which does not appear to be the case for COVID-19” - Director General of World Health Organisation (WHO)*
 - *“COVID-19 is transmitted via droplets and fomites (contaminated surfaces or objects) during close unprotected contact between an infector and an infectee. Airborne spread has not been reported for COVID-19 and it is not believed to be a major driver of transmission based on available evidence.” (WHO)*
- It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.
- The World Health Organisation has now confirmed the virus is a global pandemic
- New Zealand Health authorities are reiterating that large gatherings at this stage will not be stopped, but that people who are unwell should stay at home and not attend public gatherings. However there have been cancellations of large public events such as Pacifica Festival in Auckland.

If someone is confirmed with COVID-19 infection:

- 80% of confirmed cases of all ages have mild to moderate symptoms
- 6.1% of all cases are treated as critical – most of these people have other health conditions
- If a child or young person does get confirmed with the case, 97.5% will get mild to moderate symptoms only (0.2% critical)

- Recovery time (median) from onset to recovery in mild cases is 2 weeks. For severe and critical cases it is 3-6 weeks
- **COVID-19 isn't easily transmitted** – and in China research shows it is largely occurring in families (75% - 85% of clusters occur within families), not in the community
- Again, in China, early studies suggest that less than 10% of family members of confirmed cases, have been infected with COVID-19
- The people most affected are those over 60 years of age, and those with underlying conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer
- As with other illnesses such as flu, the highest mortality rate is in those over the age of 80 (see chart below)

New Zealand Government Initiatives:

- New Zealand has adopted a firm self-isolation policy to all travellers coming into NZ (except Pacific Islands) to slowdown the spread of the virus, this is important to ensure our health systems can properly deal with cases. All arrivals are followed up by the Ministry to check they are following the self-isolation guidelines (see: <https://www.health.govt.nz/>)
- There is strong emphasis on people practicing social distancing (no handshakes/hugs/highfive's/hongi's) keep your distance.
- Regular broadcasting of the Health Line number 0800 358 5453 or phone your doctor – DO NOT GO INTO THE DOCTOR SURGERY UNANNOUNCED
- Free counselling line phone: 1737 free to talk or text

New Zealand Government economic response:

- The New Zealand Government is to release relief package to assist businesses severely hit by the pandemic- the tourism industry has been highlighted as an example
- The Reserve bank has announced a drop in the official cash rate – to allow businesses to borrow more easily during this time

