Gippsland Region Public Health Unit

Part of **Latrobe Regional Health**

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019)

FACTSHEET

WHAT IS COVID-19?
- COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is a disease caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2. This virus spreads quickly attacking the lungs and causing respiratory illness in humans.
- The symptoms are similar to the common cold, flu or pneumonia.
- Generally, people with COVID-19 develop symptoms 5-6 days after exposure to the virus.
- Most people have mild symptoms and recover without treatment, but some people become severely ill and need to be admitted in hospital and in some cases can go on to develop Long-COVID disease. *More information on long-COVID is available here:* Long COVID - Better Health Channel.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

Most common symptoms	Less common symptoms	Long-COVID symptoms
• Fever (37.5°C or higher) • Chills • Sore throat • Cough • Runny or stuffy nose • Difficulty breathing	• Muscle or body aches • Headache • Loss or change of sense taste or smell • Nausea, vomiting, appetite loss and diarrhoea • Hoarse voice	• Fatigue • Breathlessness • Confusion, forgetfulness, or a lack of mental focus or clarity • Anxiety or depression • Difficulty sleeping

People with the following symptoms should seek immediate medical attention:
- difficulty breathing, especially at rest, or unable to speak in sentences
- confusion
- drowsiness or loss of consciousness
- persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- skin being cold or clammy, or turning pale or a bluish colour
- loss of speech or movement.

HOW IS COVID-19 SPREAD?

- COVID-19 usually spreads between people in close contact. An infected person may cough, sneeze or breathe out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus.
    - People can breathe in these droplets and particles, or they may land on their eyes, nose, or mouth. In some circumstances, these droplets may contaminate surfaces they touch.
- Anyone infected with COVID-19 can spread it, even if they do NOT have symptoms.
    - If you have COVID-19 symptoms, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19, it is important to stay at home and avoid contact with others until your symptoms have gone.

WHO IS AT RISK SEVERE ILLNESS FROM COVID-19?

Whilst anyone can get COVID-19, some people are at higher risk of serious illness including:

- Older people aged 70 years plus, especially those living in aged care or a long-term care facility
- Pregnant women
- People of any age especially those aged 50 or over with pre-existing health problems such as: cancer, HIV, diabetes, obesity, dementia, chronic lung conditions (including severe asthma), heart, liver or rheumatological problems and other chronic conditions, people taking medicine that weakens their immune systems or complex disability in children and adults that need regular medical follow up or hospitalisation
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 30 years and over with additional risk factors listed above
- Unvaccinated people have a higher risk of severe disease and hospitalisation
- People without stable, safe, and functional housing

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HOW CAN I AVOID GETTING COVID-19?

1. **Get vaccinated.** COVID-19 vaccines provide strong protection against severe illness and death. A person may still get COVID-19 after vaccination, but they are less likely to have severe symptoms or require hospitalisation.
   - Stay up to date with recommended COVID-19 vaccinations.
   - Anyone who is 5 years or older can get a COVID-19 vaccination.
   - If you're worried about side effects, speak with your doctor. If you are eligible for a booster dose you can take it 6months following a previous dose or 6months after you recover from a COVID-19 infection.
   - When you've had all the doses you need of a COVID-19 vaccine, we say you are up to date with your vaccinations.
   - **Book to get vaccines here** Find a health service | healthdirect

2. **Stay home when you are sick**. People with COVID-19 symptoms should stay home when sick and only leave home for medical care or other urgent reasons. Wear a properly fitted mask if you need to leave your home.

3. **Stop the spread**. If you are at high-risk of severe illness or have been close to people who are sick, it is a good idea to wear a properly fitted face mask when you're in a public indoor space or somewhere that is crowded.

4. **Hand hygiene**: you should wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds - If you can't wash your hands, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

   - Cover your mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze; dispose of used tissues right away and clean your hands.
   - Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces you use often, such as benchtops and door handles.
   - Avoid touching your face.
   - Improve indoor air quality by opening windows. Use fly screens to keep insects out.

HOW IS COVID-19 DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

There are two types of tests used to diagnose COVID-19:
- A **rapid antigen test (RAT)** that you can do yourself. You can buy RATs at supermarkets, pharmacies, and other retailers. You should plan ahead by keeping some at home for testing if you have COVID-19 symptoms.
- A **PCR test** that can be taken by your doctor or private pathology provider. Your GP will assess you and based on your symptoms and existing medical conditions, may give you a referral to a pathology collection centre. *You may need to pay for your PCR test.* Results should be available in 2 days but may sometimes take longer.

If your test positive:
- Follow the **Checklist for COVID-19 cases**, including staying home for at least 5 days or until you don't have symptoms anymore.

- Check if you are eligible for **COVID-19 antiviral medicines** and speak with your GP.

If your test is negative:
- you should stay home until your symptoms go away to avoid spreading your illness.

You're no longer required to report your positive rapid antigen test (RAT) in Victoria.

Covid-19 antiviral medicine:

Antiviral medications stop people from getting very sick and can only be prescribed by your GP. Speak with your GP to find out if you are eligible for this medication. This does not replace vaccination and most people can safely recover at home without using antiviral medication.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I GET COVID-19?
- COVID-19 is a notifiable condition in Victoria.
- The Department of Health and the Gippsland Region Public Health Unit (GRPHU) recommended you stay at home if you have flu-like symptoms even if you test negative for COVID-19, so that you do not infect other people.
- Check out the checklist above and find out if you're eligible for antiviral medicines.
- The Gippsland Region Public Health Unit will support outbreak prevention and management efforts in high-risk settings such as residential aged care facilities.
- The Department of Health or GRPHU may issue an alert if a COVID-19 wave is detected so you can take the necessary precautions.
- You can stay up to date with GRPHU news and alerts by visiting our website available through this link: Gippsland Region Public Health Unit - LRH

Scan QR code to access
Better Health Channel COVID-19
page.