



Novel Coronavirus

Information current 22 January 2020, 1300hrs WST

What is Novel Coronavirus and what is the current situation?

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).
- A novel coronavirus (CoV) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- In terms of the situation, this is constantly evolving. Authorities are working to understand the full extent of the strain and transmission.
- Information is expected to change daily, if not hourly, as further information comes to light.

Who is in charge of the response globally and in Australia?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is closely monitoring the situation and is in regular contact with Chinese authorities to provide support required.
- The Australian Department of Health is the lead agency on this situation in Australia and is in contact with the WHO.
- At a State and Territory level, Chief Health Officers and Communicable Disease Control teams are working in partnership with the Australian Department of Health to ensure an evidence-based response is undertaken.

What is the risk to Western Australians?

- No cases of Novel Coronavirus have been detected in Western Australia.
- There is no need for alarm, but travellers are asked to check the Smart Traveller website prior to travelling to ensure they have the latest information.
- Yesterday the Australian Government changed its travel advice to high for the Wuhan City in Hubei Province, China. However the current travel advice for China remains at exercise normal safety precautions. Updates to this advice will be published on the Smart Traveller website.
- It is important to remember that it is winter in the Northern Hemisphere and therefore flu season. Many people may have symptoms for a wide range of other respiratory illnesses that are not associated with this infection.
- If people with a travel history of recent travel to Wuhan present to a health care practitioner in WA and they are unwell with fever and respiratory symptoms, they will be assessed for the virus.

What are is WA doing at its airports?

- Australia's current airport systems and processes are robust to safeguard our borders.

- At this point in time, the WHO has currently not recommended any additional measures at airports – beyond our current, established mechanisms.
- While WA now has direct flights to China, it does not have direct flights from Wuhan. The current advice is that we have appropriate processes in place here in WA and that additional screening is not required. *Note: In Sydney, where there are direct flights from Wuhan, additional biosecurity and health officers have been put in place to meet every flight for screening.*
- However, the WA Department of Health is being vigilant and if this changes, we are prepared.
- Western Australians are assured that in addition to being in contact with Health agencies, the WA Department of Health is also in regular contact with Perth Airport.
- There are already mechanisms in place to respond to ill travellers at points of entry. This is standard practise.
- Under Australian legislation airlines must report passengers on board showing signs of an infectious disease, including fever, sweats or chills.
- As a standard process, when a plane reports an ill traveller, they are met on arrival by biosecurity officers who make an assessment and take necessary actions, such as isolation and referral to hospital where required.
- Australia also has processes in place to enhance border measures in relation to a communicable disease, if required, working through our established Health Protection system.
- In addition, information displayed on electronic message boards will also be in place at ports of entry into Australia, warning people about the disease and alerting them that if they do develop symptoms on arrival or after arrival, that they should seek medical attention.

What is happening at a national response level?

- At a national level, the National Incident Control Room has been activated, with regular liaison with the World Health Organization and other agencies.
- Nationally consistent processes for laboratory protocols and clinical diagnosis for Novel Coronavirus are also being developed – should they be required.

Summary

- This situation is constantly evolving.
- Currently, the risk of transmission in Australia is low. Western Australians should therefore be alert but not alarmed.
- The WA Department of Health will continue to work with the Australian Department of Health on the response to Novel Coronavirus.
- The WA Department of Health will remain vigilant and continue to review and monitor the situation to respond appropriately to protect our residents.

ENDS

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