Subject: **LMM 24/03/2020 -** Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community and Economic Resilience Response

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MOTION

That City of Newcastle:

1. Receives a briefing from the City of Newcastle COVID-19 Planning Team, that meets daily, on the activation of our Emergency Management Action Plan (EMAP) aligned with state and national emergency plans, at this Ordinary Council meeting of 24 March 2020;

2. **Part A:**

    1. Commends our local doctors, nurses and health care workers for their immense efforts to stop the spread of Cornoavirus (COVID-19), particularly workers at John Hunter Hospital and our all our health facilities, for their incredible efforts to keep Novovcastrians as safe and healthy as possible during this difficult time of global uncertainty;
    2. Recognises that COVID-19 will have a significant impact on our community wellbeing and the local economy of Newcastle, with many people potentially isolated for periods of time, small businesses facing supply chain issues and substantially reduced economic activity, with the unemployment rate likely to rise;
    3. **Develops a Community and Economic Resilience package, to assist Novocastrians through this period of unprecedented disruption;**
    4. Recognises that the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce is paramount;
    5. Thanks NSW Police Local Area Commanders, Superintendent Brett Greentree, Newcastle Local Area Command and Superintendent Danny Sullivan, Lake Macquarie Local Area Comand, for their collaboration on the City's emergency response, through the Local Emergency Management Committee;
    6. Notes that we are working in collaboration with government partners, including NSW Health, who are the lead agency responding to COVID-19;
    7. Notes that we are working within the Local Emergency Management Committee - with NSW Police, NSW Fire Brigade, SES, Health, and Transport for NSW to ensure that our city is adequately equipped and prepared;
    8. Notes that we continue to liaise with partners including the Office of Local Government, neighbouring councils, the University of Newcastle, Port of Newcastle and the Newcastle Airport to ensure consistent information is shared with our community;

3. **Part B**

Following a number of State, National and International measures being announced, that City of Newcastle:

1. Recognises the significant first phase of stimulus measures and boosted income support measures that have been announced by the NSW and Federal Governments, aimed at supporting individuals, families, businesses and not-for-profit organisations;
2. Calls on the Federal Government to suspend mutual obligations requirements for accessing income support, including JobSeeker Payment (Newstart), Work for the Dole, Community Development Program (CDP) and ParentsNext, while noting that waiting periods to access income support payments have been waived.

3. Calls on the NSW Government to immediately increase the NSW Mandatory Pensioner Rebates on Council Rates, currently fixed at only $250, which has not been increased by the NSW Government for 27 years, since it was introduced in 1993;

4. Calls on the Federal Government to follow the lead of the United Kingdom, by guaranteeing to pay at least 80 per cent of the wages of those who have lost their jobs because of COVID-19, up to $5000 per month;

5. Calls on the Federal Government to investigate the implementation of a Universal Basic Income - a system where everyone receives a standard amount of money regardless of their current work status - to ensure that all Australian's have access to basic necessities, during, and after the COVID-19 global pandemic;

6. Calls on the NSW and Federal Governments to initiate a temporary eviction moratorium, including directions to NSW Police and court officers to not carry out or allow any evictions and the immediate cessation of public and community housing providers eviction proceedings against their tenants;

7. Asks both the NSW and Federal Governments to consider the nationalisation, or renationalisation, of key industries and organisations, including but not limited to, manufacturing of essential medical equipment such as respirators and face masks,private hospital emergency departments, aviation, shipping, public transport, energy and utilities, telecommunications and high-speed internet infrastructure, banking, vocational education and training, basic and essential food production andcleaning services for government buildings;

8. Calls on Minister for Local Government to amend clause 5.2 of the model meeting code of practice to allow Councillors to participate in a meeting of council by electronic means during a pandemic where public health considerations make this appropriate including where a Councillor is required to be in isolation.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 will have a very disruptive impact on the people of Newcastle

It is already a challenging time. However, City of Newcastle is taking proactive actions that will benefit our community.

Collectively, we can get through this and City of Newcastle is doing all we can to facilitate community and economic resilience.

Part of the work includes the development of a Community and Economic Resilience Response.

This response recognises that COVID-19 will have a significant impact on the community well-being and local economy of Newcastle.

Many people may be isolated for periods of time, small businesses will face supply chain issues and substantially reduced economic activity, and the unemployment rate is likely to rise significantly.

This situation requires us to consider how we can deliver the best possible economic and well-being outcomes for our community.

In collaboration with a large and diverse team across the City of Newcastle, the Smart City team is developing resilience measures in response to COVID-19.

These resilience measures are being informed by international experts and seeks to focus on areas where local government has a clear strength and mandate.

The principles we have used are about expanding existing platforms and focusing on strategic legacy items for economic and community resilience. For example expanding the local skills base, accelerating digital literacy for small business and growing community cohesion.

These measures will also align to and support the previously announced Federal NSW Government stimulus packages.

Newcastle has a long history of dealing with economic adversity, as a community we can get through this together. It will be tough and have a huge personal impact on many, but with community thinking, we can come out the other side.

COVID-19: how we are responding

The safety of our communities, customers and employees is our top priority.

Our employees are monitoring developments relating to COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) daily and assessing any potential impact on city services and events.
We aim to maintain our current level of service to residents and businesses during this period.
We take advice on all public health matters from the state and federal health departments.

To date, NSW Health and the other advising authorities are clear in their message. As of today, there is no COVID-19 cluster in the Hunter, and therefore no reason to alter our service levels to the community.

Events and public gatherings

The Prime Minister has announced that non-essential indoor gatherings are to be restricted to 100 people. Outdoor events remain to be limited to 500 people. Visit the NSW Health website for more information.

View our event and public gatherings information about City of Newcastle venues and facilities.

How we are responding

- We are promoting the NSW Health site www.health.nsw.gov.au as the primary source of information and health updates.
- The City is actively involved in the Local Emergency Management Committee's response to COVID-19 which includes police, NSW Fire Brigades, SES, Health, Transport for NSW and neighbouring councils. This is allowing us to establish joint approaches and provide consistent advice.
- A City of Newcastle COVID-19 Planning Team has been established. The Planning Team includes People and Culture (and WHS), Legal (Emergency Management and Risk) and Corporate Affairs (Communications and Community Engagement).
- Activating our Emergency Management Action Plan (EMAP) for Newcastle. This Plan is aligned to State and National emergency plans and CN's suite of Emergency Management Plans. The EMAP outlines strategies for CN in accordance with readiness and key actions which CN is committed to in accordance with relevant legislation, Acts and Regulations.

Preparedness – Key actions

- We are reviewing increased cleaning regimes for our sites and appropriate signage needs.
- We are working through flexible working options with City of Newcastle staff should this become necessary to continue delivering essential services.
- We are liaising with other agencies including the Office of Local Government, neighbouring Councils, the University of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport, to ensure sharing of information and consistent messaging to our community.

We are continuing to develop our plans to cover a situation where COVID19 becomes widespread in Australia, and state and federal governments move to greater restrictions on activities within the Newcastle Government area.

Communicating to employees

City employees who have recently travelled to affected countries or have been in contact with someone who has coronavirus will be excluded from work and have been advised to self-isolate for 14 days.

All employees have been reminded to practice good hygiene by covering coughs and sneezes, washing their hands thoroughly with soap and water, and using alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Public health information has been distributed at the City's libraries and community children's education centre.

City of Newcastle will continue to update you on the work we're doing through our Local Emergency Management Plan prepared for COVID-19.

More information on COVID-19 is available on the NSW Health website or the Federal Government Health website.

MEDIA RELEASES

Statement on events and sponsorships amid COVID-19

18 March 2020

City of Newcastle is continuing to work with the State and Federal Government on limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Following restrictions placed on events under the NSW Government Public Health Order, which states outdoor events of more than 500 must not be held before 14 June 2020, the City is implementing a number of measured responses.

Since the Order was issued, the City has been notified of around 30 cancellations or postponements of public events on community land.

For licensed events that have notified the City of cancellation, we will refund the application fee. Similarly, application fees will be refunded for any sports licences that have been issued for events now cancelled.

The City is also supporting event organisers postpone to another date free of charge, providing their preferred new date is available.

Given the current uncertainty around events, the City's annual Event Sponsorship Program (ESP) will be deferred until after the Public Health Order is repealed. This will give event organisers more certainty when planning their event and related sponsorship applications. The City will provide more information as soon as a new opening date for the program is confirmed.

The City continues to plan a proposed flagship cultural event previously scheduled for later in 2020. While it had been scheduled to fit the national cultural festival calendar, the timing is now under review as we work with the cultural and arts sector on new programming.

The City's COVID-19 Emergency Response Team meets daily to assess the latest advice and formulate plans for maintaining services.

The health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce are its paramount concerns, and the City has implemented a daily update for employees on the response, including advice around social distancing and hygiene.

The response to COVID-19, including how social distancing should work for City of Newcastle employees, is developing in line with advice from our Government partners daily.

Should it be necessary, the City's indoor workforce is well placed to work from home given the recent rollout of laptops and migration to cloud-based services.

Update on City's swimming centres

17 March 2020

City of Newcastle (CN) is working in collaboration with government partners including NSW Health to ensure our city is prepared in the event of the further spread of COVID-19 to the region.

In order to do all we can to limit the transmission of the virus and to prioritise the wellbeing of staff and the community, the end of season closure will be brought forward to Monday 23March for City-owned swimming centres across the local government area.

City of Newcastle Interim Director City Wide Services Alissa Jones said the decision affected the City-operated Beresfield Swimming Centre, along with Lambton, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend Swimming Centres, operated by BlueFit Aquatics.

"In collaboration with BlueFit we have brought forward the final day of the season to 23 March 2020 as part of our commitment to the health and wellbeing of staff and the community," Ms Jones said.

"This means that all swimming centres in Newcastle will be closed from Monday 23 March 2020.

"City of Newcastle will continue to provide lifeguard services at our beaches and ocean baths. Information on patrol hours can be found on our website.

"The City's key objectives are to provide timely information about any changes to services or the operation of our facilities and to support the State and Federal Governments to manage the impact of the pandemic.

"City of Newcastle will adjust operations to further protect public health and the health of our staff and volunteers.

"City of Newcastle is working with staff affected by the early closure of the Beresfield Swimming Centre to minimise the adverse impact on them."

BlueFit CEO Todd McHardy said BlueFit has considered a number of strategic approaches to ensure the best outcomes for both community and staff.

"The responsible solution across the Newcastle region is to bring forward the winter closure for all facilities to commence on Monday 23 March 2020, the final day of trade being Sunday 22 March 2020," Mr McHardy said.

"Safety is our number one priority and with ongoing government-imposed reductions in mass gathering numbers and further recommendations on social distancing, we believe closing the Newcastle swimming venues will limit the transmission of the virus in our community.

"We recognise the financial impact this has on our staff and the broader community, therefore, BlueFit has developed a safety net strategy to support our team and customers in times of hardship in an effort to reduce the impact across our network.

"All learn to swim program participants will be notified through separate correspondence of relevant closures and program disruption. We are committed to supporting both the community and our staff through this period and we are grateful for the strong partnership we have with the City of Newcastle to assist us through these tough decisions.

"We feel the impact on the community will be minimal given we are entering the end of the summer season and with the magnificent beaches and ocean baths available in Newcastle, and prioritises the health and wellbeing of staff and the broader community."

City's cultural facilities' response to COVID-19

17 March 2020

In response to COVID-19, the Federal Government has introduced social distancing measures, which include limiting non-essential organised gatherings of 500 people or more. Unsurprisingly, the Civic Theatre has been advised by promoters of all upcoming shows that they have been either cancelled or postponed.

Our ticketing service provider, Ticketek, will inform all customers affected by a show cancellation directly. Many show promoters are postponing rather than cancelling.

The Civic Theatre will provide regular updates on its website and by social media.

The Playhouse and Civic Café will continue to operate but have instituted the additional recommended social distancing measure of ensuring customers are seated 1.5 metres apart.

Whilst the Newcastle Art Gallery remains open, in order for the City to do all it can to limit the transmission of the virus in our communities, and to prioritise the wellbeing of members, staff, volunteers and visitors, all public programming at the Gallery has been suspended until further notice. This includes programs Art Cart and Last Fridays.

Newcastle Museum remains open but has suspended the Supernova and Mininova Gallery exhibition as well as the Bush Mechanics and Cultural Resurgence exhibitions.

Fort Scratchley is open, however its popular Tunnel Tours have been suspended to limit close contact in a confined space.

All City library branches are open, however programs and events have been suspended until further notice.

City of Newcastle is working in collaboration with government partners including NSW Health to ensure our city is prepared in the event of the further spread of COVID-19 to the region.

The City's key objectives are to provide timely information about any changes to services or the operation of our facilities and to support the State and Federal Governments to manage the impact of the pandemic.

City of Newcastle will adjust operations to further protect public health and the health of our staff and volunteers.

City working with key partners on COVID-19 response

13 March 2020

City of Newcastle is working in collaboration with government partners including NSW Health to ensure our city is prepared in the event of further spread of COVID-19 to the region.
City of Newcastle's key objectives are to:
- provide timely information about any changes to services or the operation of our facilities
- support the State and Federal governments to manage the impact of the pandemic
- adjust our operations to further protect public health and the health of our staff.

Public health is the number one priority for City of Newcastle and all agencies working collaboratively on the COVID-19 response.

We're working within the Local Emergency Management Committee - with NSW Police, NSW Fire Brigades, SES, Health, and Transport for NSW to ensure that our city is adequately equipped and prepared.

The City is also liaising with partners including the Office of Local Government, neighbouring councils, the University of Newcastle, Port of Newcastle and the Newcastle Airport to ensure consistent information is shared with our community.

How we are responding:

- The City of Newcastle COVID-19 Planning Team has activated an Emergency Management Action Plan (EMAP) aligned with state and national emergency plans.
- Working with the Local Emergency Management Committee to establish joint approaches and provide consistent advice.
- Establishing a dedicated webpage which is being regularly updated to provide information about our essential services www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/COVID-19
- Working with event organisers following restrictions on non-essential gatherings of more than 500 people.
- Each City of Newcastle service area is developing a business continuity plan to support the EMAP should the spread of the virus prompt the state and federal governments to introduce greater restrictions on activities within our Local Government Area.

The NSW Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au is the primary source of health information.

The City is supporting the NSW Government in sharing information on its channels.

NSW Health – COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Pandemic

What is a pandemic?

A pandemic is an epidemic (infectious disease outbreak) that spreads on a global scale. Pandemics usually occur when a new infectious disease emerges that can spread rapidly around the world.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020. This COVID-19 pandemic is the first caused by a coronavirus. (WHO)

What causes pandemics?

A pandemic can occur when a new virus emerges and there is worldwide spread of the disease. Most people do not have immunity to a new virus. Viruses that have caused past pandemics usually come from animal viruses that have mutated to affect humans.

For a new virus to have pandemic potential it must meet three criteria:

- humans have little or no pre-existing immunity against the virus
- the virus causes disease in humans
- the virus can spread efficiently from person to person.

Previous pandemics include Spanish Influenza in 1918 or H1N1 Swine Flu in 2009. Only Type A influenza viruses have been known to cause influenza pandemics. This COVID-19 pandemic is the first caused by a coronavirus.

What does it mean that the WHO has declared a pandemic?

On 11 March WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The WHO used this declaration to call for urgent and aggressive action.

They noted that this is a pandemic that can be controlled. Both China and the Republic of Korea have significantly declining outbreaks.

On 30 January, the WHO declared that COVID-19 was a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In the last two weeks, the number of cases of COVID-19 has increased substantially and the number of affected countries has tripled (WHO).

Why do pandemics occur? How serious will the impact be?

The health impact of a pandemic on the community depends on how easily the virus can be spread between people (i.e. transmissibility) and the seriousness of the illness it causes (i.e. clinical severity).

Healthcare systems can limit the impact on a community by slowing the spread of the infection between people and increasing the ability of the healthcare system to look after people who do get sick. NSW Health is putting a lot of effort into doing both of these things.

About COVID-19

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause illness in humans and others cause illness in animals, such as bats, camels, and civets. Human coronaviruses generally cause mild illness, such as the common cold.

Rarely, animal coronaviruses can evolve to infect and spread among humans, causing severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which emerged in 2002, and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) which emerged in 2012.

What is the COVID-19 virus?

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. It was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, where it has caused a large and ongoing

outbreak. It has since spread more widely in China. Cases have since been identified in several other countries. The COVID-19 virus is closely related to a bat coronavirus.

There is much more to learn about how COVID-19 is spread, its severity, and other features associated with the virus; epidemiological and clinical investigations are ongoing.

Outbreaks of new coronavirus infections among people are always a public health concern. The situation is evolving rapidly.

How is the virus spread?

Human coronaviruses are spread from someone infected with COVID-19 virus to other close contacts with that person through contaminated droplets spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.

The time between when a person is exposed to the virus and when symptoms first appear is typically 5 to 6 days, although may range from 2 to 14 days. For this reason, people who might have been in contact with a confirmed case are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days.
Most COVID-19 cases appear to be spread from people who have symptoms. A small number of people may have been infectious before their symptoms developed.

How long does COVID-19 last on surfaces?

According to the World Health Organization, it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with a common household disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

What are the symptoms?

Patients may have fever, cough, runny nose, shortness of breath and other symptoms.
In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia with severe acute respiratory distress.

What is the difference between COVID-19 and the flu?
The first symptoms of COVID-19 and influenza (flu) infections are often very similar. They both cause fever and similar respiratory symptoms, which can then range from mild through to severe disease, and sometimes can be fatal.

Both viruses are also transmitted in the same way, by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with hands, surfaces or objects contaminated with the virus. As a result, the same public health measures, such as hand hygiene (hand washing), good respiratory etiquette (coughing into your elbow or into a tissue and immediately disposing of the tissue) and good household cleaning are important actions to prevent both infections.

The speed of transmission is an important difference between the two viruses. Influenza typically has a shorter incubation period (the time from infection to appearance of symptoms) than COVID-19. This means that influenza can spread faster than COVID-19.

While the range of symptoms for the two viruses is similar, the fraction with severe disease appears to be higher for COVID-19. While most people have mild symptoms, approximately 15% of people have severe infections and 5% require intensive care in a hospital ICU. The proportions of severe and critical COVID-19 infections are higher than for influenza infections. I have travelled to another country.

What should I do?

If you have been overseas in the last 14 days, you should:

- self isolate yourself from others for 14 days from the day you returned or arrived from overseas and monitor yourself for symptoms

If you develop a fever or respiratory symptoms, please:

- call your doctor or healthdirect on 1800 022 222. When you call, tell them where you have travelled or if you have been in contact with a confirmed case.
  or (if your symptoms are severe)
- visit your local Emergency Department. When you arrive, immediately tell staff where you have travelled or if you have been in contact with a confirmed case.

If you have symptoms it is important that don't go to work, school/university/childcare, the gym, or public areas, and you should not use public transport, taxis, or ride-sharing services. If you need to seek medical care wear a surgical mask if available when attending. You should not use public transport, taxis, or ride-sharing services to get to your doctor or emergency department.

Should I avoid attending public events, for example, religious celebrations, music festivals or sporting matches?

On 15 March 2020, NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard made an Order under Section 7 of the Public Health Act 2010 to force the immediate cancellation of major events with more than 500 people. This includes events such as concerts, sporting fixtures with large crowds, exhibitions and religious celebrations.

Individuals who fail to comply could face up to six months in prison or a fine of up to $11,000 or both, plus additional penalties for each day the offence continues. Corporations face even harsher fines.
Critical workforce, such as healthcare professionals and emergency services workers, are also recommended to limit their attendance at non-essential meetings or conferences.

The advice on mass gatherings does not apply to attendance at schools, universities or child care centres. While all Australians are encouraged to exercise personal responsibility for social distancing, there are no current restrictions recommended on attending other settings, such as shopping centres, or using public transport.

For non-essential organised gatherings with fewer than 500 attendees, NSW Health recommends that organisers:

- remind attendees and staff not to attend if they are feeling unwell

- remind attendees and staff they must not attend if they have travelled overseas in the past 14 days
- ensure emergency management plans are up to date
- brief staff on how to practice good hygiene and making it easy for staff and attendees to practice good hygiene
- have adequate hand washing facilities available NSW Health also encourages people considering attending these gatherings to:
  - stay home and not attend if you are feeling unwell
  - stay home and not attend if you have travelled overseas in the past 14 days
  - practice good personal hygiene including:
  - cleaning your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub
  - covering your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or a flexed elbow.

How long does the COVID-19 infection last?

The infection period for the virus will vary from person to person. Mild symptoms in an otherwise healthy individual may resolve over just a few days. Similar to influenza, for an individual with other ongoing health issues, such as a respiratory condition, recovery may take weeks and in severe cases could be potentially fatal.

What if I don't have Medicare?

Most people that are not eligible for Medicare will have health or travel insurance. For those that do not have adequate insurance coverage, NSW Health will waive these costs.

This includes the waiving of payment and debt recovery procedures for ambulance transfers of people suspected to have COVID-19 infection, who are taken to NSW Health facilities for assessment.

These arrangements have been put in place to ensure payment issues are not a barrier for people from overseas with respiratory symptoms seeking early medical advice.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

Infection with COVID-19 is diagnosed by finding evidence of the virus in respiratory samples such as swabs from the back of the nose and throat or fluid from the lungs. Samples for testing can be taken directly by GPs or at a range of private pathology sites across the state that are suitable for collection of COVID-19, or at public hospitals across NSW.

What should I do if I come into contact with a person with COVID-19?

If you have been identified as a contact of a person with confirmed COVID-19 infection in Australia, the local public health unit will contact you with advice. You need to isolate yourself at home for 14 days after contact with the infected person, and to monitor your health and report any symptoms.

Person to person spread of coronaviruses generally occurs between people who are close contacts with one another. A close contact is typically someone who has been face to face for at least 15 minutes, or been in the same closed space for at least 2 hours, with a person that was infectious.

The public health unit will keep in touch with people who are close contacts of patients with COVID-19 infection. If any symptoms develop contacts must call the public health unit to report those symptoms.

If your contact with the person was less than this, there is a much smaller risk of you being infected. However, as a precaution you must still monitor your health until 14 days after you were last exposed to the infectious person. If you develop symptoms including a fever and/or respiratory signs, please call ahead to talk to a doctor or call healthdirect on 1800 022 222. Tell your doctor that you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19. The doctor may tell you to attend your nearest emergency department – if so when you arrive, immediately tell staff you have had contact with someone with COVID-19.

More information about home isolation is available for:
- people suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection
- close contacts and recently returned travellers.

Practice simple hygiene by:

- making sure to clean your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or a flexed elbow.

What should I do if I come into contact with a person who has been identified as a contact?

If you have been in contact with a person identified as a close contact of another person with confirmed COVID-19 infection, you do not need to self-isolate (although the close contact does) and don't need take any other special precautions.

If a close contact develops symptoms and is confirmed as a COVID-19 case, public health authorities will determine who, if anyone, has been in close contact with them while they were infectious, and these people will be directed to self-isolate.

Who is most at risk?

In Australia, the people most at risk of getting COVID-19 coronavirus infections are those who have:
- recently returned from overseas, particularly from mainland China, Iran, Italy or Korea
- been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

There is also evidence of limited spread of COVID-19 in the community in Australia.
Based on what we know so far about COVID-19 and what we know about other coronaviruses, those at greatest risk of serious infection are:

- people aged 65 years and over
- Aboriginal people (as they have higher rates of chronic illness)
- people with chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease, neurological conditions and diabetes
- people with impaired immune systems (such as people who have cancer or HIV, or who take high dose corticosteroids).

People living in group residential settings are at greater risk of being exposed to outbreaks of COVID-19 if a case is diagnosed in a resident or staff member. This includes:

- people living in residential aged care facilities and disability group homes
- people in detention facilities
- students in boarding schools
- people on Cruise Ships.

People living in some group residential settings are also more likely to have conditions that make them at greater risk of serious COVID-19 infection.

How is it prevented?

Some simple measures significantly reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 and of spreading it:

- Clean your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub/sanitiser.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or use your elbow, not your hands
- Avoid close contact with people unwell with cold or flu-like symptoms, and stay home if you have these symptoms.
- Avoid touching your face and avoid shaking hands with others.
- Try to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from others as much as possible, and avoid crowded places.

Is there a cure or vaccine?

There are no vaccines that protect against COVID-19.

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19. Early diagnosis and general supportive care are important. Most of the time, symptoms will resolve on their own. People who have serious disease with complications can be cared for in hospital.

Has my doctor been informed?

Health workers in NSW public hospital emergency departments as well as community-based general practitioners are aware of the symptoms and actions to take to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through careful infection control measures.

What if I am unable to speak to my doctor?

If you are after medical advice and your general practitioner is not able to speak with you, you can call healthdirect on 1800 022 222. They will be able to discuss your symptoms and travel history with you, to help decide if COVID-19 testing is recommended.

How do I get tested for COVID-19?

NSW Health is recommending people with acute, cold, flu-like symptoms who are returned travellers, or a contact of a confirmed case, be tested for COVID-19.

Samples for testing can be taken directly by GPs or at a range of private pathology sites across the state that are suitable for collection of COVID-19, or at public hospitals across NSW.

COVID-19/Flu clinics are being established within all Local Health Districts across NSW to assess and diagnose patients with possible COVID-19 infections and other respiratory illness such as influenza as we approach the winter season.

NSW Health is also expanding the laboratory capacity across public hospitals and private laboratories to scale up the analytical testing to determine the results of those tests.

Currently, NSW Health laboratories have capacity to perform more than 1,000 tests a day at three public hospitals at Randwick, Westmead, and Liverpool, and they will soon be joined by four more hospitals: Royal North Shore, Royal Prince Alfred, John Hunter, and Nepean. NSW Health has already engaged private pathology laboratories to assist in the collection of samples from people who require COVID-19 testing.

Testing is recommended for all returning overseas travellers who develop symptoms within 14 days of return, contacts of cases who develop symptoms, people admitted to hospital with severe respiratory infection irrespective of travel history, other special circumstances such as where there is an outbreak of respiratory infections without an identified cause such as flu.

This testing can take up to two days to complete and report back.

How are other coronaviruses tested?

COVID-19 is one kind of coronavirus, but there are other kinds of coronaviruses that have infected people for many years around the world, including in Australia. If you are sick with a respiratory infection (for example you have a cough, runny nose, sore throat or fever), the doctor may order a swab from the back of your nose or throat for testing. Many laboratories will test the swab for several different viruses.

This test is called a multiplex viral respiratory panel, which often include tests for these other coronaviruses. These tests currently do not test for COVID-19 and do not indicate whether it is present or absent.

Are people in NSW at risk?
COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, where it has caused a large and ongoing outbreak. It has since spread more widely in many other countries.

NSW Health has developed and exercised a range of procedures for case finding, diagnosis, and contact tracing for high consequence infectious diseases (such as pandemic influenza, SARS, MERS, and emerging infections) should they occur in NSW. These procedures are being used to identify contacts of any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in NSW.

What arrangements are in place for checking people at airports?

The Australian Government has put in place protective measures at all international ports. For the most recent advice from the Australian Government, please visit Department of Health - Coronavirus (COVID-19).

What arrangements are in place for checking people who arrive at sea ports?

For each cruise ship arriving into NSW from overseas, a NSW Health expert panel conducts a risk assessment based on the ports visited, whether passengers and crew have a risk of exposure to COVID-19, whether the ship's doctor has identified a respiratory outbreak on board, and the results of test results done on board the ship.

Following this risk assessment, further assessment may be done when the ship docks, including checking people with fever and respiratory symptoms or who have risk of exposure to COVID-19, and testing them for respiratory infections, including COVID-19. As there is an incubation period (before symptoms develop and tests are positive) for all infections including COVID-19, screening people for disease is not a failsafe, and is only one piece of the assessment.
Cruise ships have large number of passengers (often thousands), many of whom are older and have chronic medical conditions. Respiratory infections (unrelated to COVID-19) among passengers and crew are common on cruise ships. Cruise ships are responsible for, and have policies to prevent and manage outbreaks of disease on board.

Australians on cruise ships

An outbreak of COVID-19 occurred on the Diamond Princess cruise ship which was docked in Japan. Although initial reports indicated that a person on the Westerdam ship in Cambodia had been infected, the infection has not been confirmed.

If you are concerned about someone on one of the Diamond Princess, please call the DFAT consular emergency line.

For more information see the Australian Department of Health Coronavirus (COVID-19).

What is the public health response to COVID-19?

Infection with COVID-19 is a notifiable condition under the NSW Public Health Act 2010, so doctors and pathology laboratories are required to notify NSW Health of all people suspected or confirmed to have the infection.

Public health unit staff will investigate all cases to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Protecting against COVID-19

How can I protect myself / my family?
The best way to protect yourself is the same as you would against any respiratory infection. Practice good hygiene by:
- making sure to clean your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or a flexed elbow
- avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.

Make sure you stay home if you are sick.

Do face masks protect against COVID-19? Which face masks?

Face masks are not recommended for the general population.

People who have symptoms and might be infected with COVID-19 are required to stay in isolation at home and should wear a surgical face mask when in the same room as another person and when seeking medical advice to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to anyone else.

Health care workers who are caring for patients with suspected COVID-19 should use appropriate personal protective equipment to protect themselves against COVID-19. For more information refer to Clinical Excellence Commission (CEC) - Coronavirus COVID-19.

Are there enough face masks in NSW?

Additional supplies of face masks have been distributed for specific health workers by NSW Health and the Australian Government to meet current demand. NSW Health will continue to monitor supplies of face masks in NSW.

How is hospital equipment and furniture being cleaned to protect against COVID-19?

Hospitals ensure surfaces are cleaned and disinfected after each suspected case, as are ambulances. There is an Infection Prevention and Control Practice Handbook that outlines the appropriate steps for cleaning a room to ensure there are no viruses remaining. Staff also wear protective gear when cleaning to protect themselves and limit any spread of infection.

Is it safe for me to go to a hospital where a COVID-19 case is?

NSW Health works with its hospitals to maintain high infection control standards. NSW hospitals and clinicians are well trained in caring for people with infectious diseases, and in preventing their transmission to other patients.

How do we know the people who have had COVID-19 are no longer infectious?

People with confirmed COVID-19 infection stay in isolation under the care of medical specialists until they are no longer experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Before they are released from isolation, they have tests to see if they still have COVID-19 and the specialist care team assesses they are no longer infectious. Once they are discharged they have a follow up assessment by the medical team to make sure they remain well.

Work, university, school and travel arrangements
I have a holiday / work trip. Should I cancel my trip?

The Australian Government provides up-to-date information and advice for safe travel overseas. If you are heading overseas to destinations which may have been affected, check the advice on Smart Traveller.

Can my child attend school?

Any student or staff member who over the last 14 days has been overseas should be in self-isolation for 14 days after they returned. They are excluded from school and should not return to school or child care services for a period of 14 days after arriving, as the COVID-19 incubation period can be as long as two weeks.

Staff and students who have been identified as close contacts of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 during their infectious period must also self-isolate at home, and should not attend school or childcare settings until 14 days after their last contact with the infected person.

Can my child visit aged care facilities?

As children can spread a range of respiratory infections, such as influenza and RSV, with only mild symptoms, we recommend that aged care facilities do not have groups of children attend the facilities as we grapple with an early influenza season and potentially increasing spread of COVID-19.

Anyone who is sick, including children and even with minimal symptoms, should defer their visit until they are well.

Do I need a medical certificate clearing me for work, school, university or other settings?

No. If you do not have any symptoms there is no testing that can be done to predict whether or not you will become unwell. It is not possible to issue a 'medical clearance certificate'.

Once 14 days have passed since you returned from overseas, you have passed the time in which you would become sick if you were exposed to COVID-19. If you are still completely well 14 days after you arrived then you will not get COVID-19 from your time overseas, and you can cease self-isolation and return to work, school and university.

Do I need to isolate myself if I have returned from holiday?

If you have been overseas in the last 14 days (including transit), you should stay at home and isolate yourself for 14 days after you returned. You should watch out for symptoms.
If you develop a fever, a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath within 14 days of travel, you should:
- Call your doctor or healthdirect on 1800 022 222. When you call, tell them where you have travelled or if you have been in contact with a confirmed case.
  or (if your symptoms are severe)
- visit your local Emergency Department. When you arrive, immediately tell staff where you have travelled or if you have been in contact with a confirmed case.

It is important if you have symptoms you should not go to work, school/university/childcare, the gym, or public areas, and you should not use public transport, taxis, or ride-sharing services. If you need to seek medical care wear a surgical mask if available when attending.
If I am worried about having COVID-19, can I ask to get tested?

If you develop fever, cough, runny nose, shortness of breath and other symptoms and have travelled overseas in the 14 days before developing symptoms, you should see your GP or visit your local Emergency Department to be tested for COVID-19. If you are visiting your GP, please call ahead before seeing your doctor and and tell them where you have travelled.

If you are become unwell with these symptoms without travel you should see your local GP and discuss your symptoms. There are other illnesses such as influenza that your GP may wish to test you for that can cause your symptoms.

My work is saying that I need to get tested for COVID-19 as I have travelled recently - what should I do?

There is no need for you to be tested unless you develop fever, cough, runny nose, and shortness of breath or other symptoms and have travelled overseas in the 14 days before developing symptoms. You should see your GP or visit your local Emergency Department to be tested for COVID-19. If you are visiting your GP, please call ahead beforehand and tell them where you have travelled. You should self-isolate and exclude yourself from work until your test result is available.

If you are become unwell with these symptoms without travel you should see your local GP and discuss your symptoms. There are other illnesses such as influenza that your GP may wish to test you for that can cause your symptoms.

Home isolation

Do I need to be separate from other people in my home if I am isolating?

Yes. If you are sharing your home with others, you should stay in a different room from other people or be separated as much as possible. Wear a surgical mask when you are in the same room as another person, and when seeking medical care. Use a separate bathroom, if available.

Make sure that you do not share a room with people who are at risk of severe disease, such as elderly people and those who have heart, lung or kidney conditions, and diabetes.
Visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home should not visit while you are isolating.

More information about home isolation is available for:
- people suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection
- close contacts and recently returned travellers.

Someone in my household recently returned from overseas or has been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case and is self-isolating. Do I need to self-isolate too?

Other members of the household are not required to be isolated unless they have also:
- been overseas in the last 14 days
- been a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case.

Make sure you maintain a safe distance from that person at all times but support them as much as possible to maintain their self-isolation.
How can I access groceries and medicines while in home isolation?

If you need groceries or medicines (including prescription medicines), ask a family member or friend (who is not in isolation) to deliver them to your home or shop for groceries online. To prevent infecting other people, make sure you wear a mask when receiving a delivery or have the groceries left at your door.

When someone has finished 14 days isolation, do they need to see their GP?

If you are well at the end of 14 days self-isolation, you can resume your normal lifestyle.
Are you worried that you or someone you know may have or has COVID-19; or are anxious about being in isolation and would you like to speak to someone about it?

Contact one of the services below for support or talk to your general practitioner.
- Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14 or Lifeline Australia
  A crisis support service that provides short term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551800 or Kids Helpline
  A free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.
- NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511
  Mental health crisis telephone service in NSW.

Social distancing
What is social distancing?

Social distancing means we reduce the number of close physical and social contacts we have with one another.

When social distancing actions are combined with good personal hygiene measures the spread of a pandemic through the community can be slowed. This helps protect the most vulnerable members of the community and reduces the impact of the pandemic on essential, life-saving health services.

Social distancing is an effective measure, but it is recognised that it cannot be practised in all situations and the aim is to generally reduce potential for transmission.

While practising social distancing, people can travel to work (including public transport). For non-essential activities outside the workplace or attendance at schools, universities and childcare - social distancing includes:
- avoiding crowds and mass gatherings where it is difficult to keep the appropriate distance away from others
- avoiding small gatherings in enclosed spaces, for example family celebrations
- attempting to keep a distance of 1.5 metres between themselves and other people where possible, for example when they are out and about in public place.
- avoiding shaking hands, hugging, or kissing other people.
- avoiding visiting vulnerable people, such as those in aged care facilities or hospitals, infants, or people with compromised immune systems due to illness or medical treatment.

Who should practice social distancing?

Everyone should practice social distancing, as it reduces the potential for transmission.
For more information about social distancing, refer to COVID-19 - Advice for the NSW community.

Is it safe for me to go to the gym?

Keeping fit remains important. If you are well and have not been asked to self-isolate then you can go to the gym. Don't go to the gym if you are unwell.

Try to go to the gym when it's less crowded. When at the gym, you should use wipes provided before you use each piece of equipment. Gym classes are currently OK, but this advice may change.

Gyms should ensure that they are cleaning regularly, using appropriate disinfectant.

Bulk-buying

Should I be bulk-buying items to prepare?

There is no need to bulk-buy products at supermarkets including toilet paper, paracetamol and canned food.

It is prudent for households to have a small stock of non-perishable groceries to cover the event that in the coming months the household has been asked to self-isolate for 14 days. However, it's important to note the role of family and friends in supporting those in isolation and also to note that online grocery delivery services are now available in most areas of NSW.
Pets and animals

Can pets be infected with COVID-19?

While COVID-19 seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now mainly spreading from person-to-person. There is no reason to think that any animals including pets in Australia might be a source of infection with this new virus.

There have been no reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19 in Australia.

There is also no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19. However, since animals can spread other diseases to people, it's always a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals.

Can I be infected with COVID-19 from Australian bats?

At this stage, there is no evidence that bats (or any other animals) carry the COVID-19 virus in Australia. However, Australian bats can carry other serious infections, such as Australian bat lyssavirus and Hendra virus so they are best avoided. You should also avoid bats overseas.
Where can I find more information?
- National Coronavirus Health Information Line 1800 020 080
- Visit NSW Health - COVID-19
- Visit the World Health Organization