

A message regarding COVID-19 from Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM

Greetings all,

The outbreak of COVID-19 has changed a lot of what we do, whether you are a staff member, a student or a community member. Although our confirmed cases are low in comparison to those overseas, authorities are preparing for cases to rise rapidly over the coming days and weeks.

As a researcher and educator in public health epidemiology, I'd like to share some advice on what to do in different circumstances during this difficult time. Please note, the information around this pandemic changes daily, so always check current advice online through the University or through the Health Department.

1. This outbreak was caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) which began in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019.
2. There are many types of coronaviruses known. Most cause simple and mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses – the common cold is just one example.
3. In rare circumstances, animal coronaviruses can evolve to infect people and can spread between people. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are two coronaviruses that originated from animals and then spread to people. Known as MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV, they became new human coronaviruses. The most recent Coronavirus – and the one we are worried about - is the 2019-nCoV.
4. COVID-19 is a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. There are many websites set up through the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the Australian Government and others that you should monitor for the most up to date information.
5. There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), although vaccines are being developed as we speak.
6. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. If exposed, in well people illness will probably be a cold type illness. Others with co-morbidities may become more unwell. Those with asthma or other respiratory issues need to follow advice from their doctor and make sure they carry their inhalers and other medicines with them. Those who are immunocompromised or otherwise unwell should seek guidance from their doctors and other health providers.
7. Australia is entering into our regular flu season. It's important to get the flu vaccine via your doctor or pharmacy and seek advice on whether you or your families are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine. There will be lots of flu around as is usual, please remember that not all of the cases you see or know of will be COVID-19.

It's important that we all care for each other and ourselves. The best way to do this is to follow the below processes:

Washing hands, hand hygiene

- Hands become unclean after touching contaminated objects. Touching objects after contaminating your hands spreads disease.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after going to the toilet, before eating or drinking, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- In between times, or if you are about to eat and your hands are visibly clean, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser or hand wipe.

Coughing, sneezing and blowing noses

- Coughing and sneezing etiquette is especially important – and people forget easily.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue and discard the tissue immediately.
- If you don't have a tissue please cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve. Don't use your hands, and always cover your mouth.
- For nose blowing, use a tissue once and discard it into a bin.

Eyes, noses and mouths

- This is how viruses enter our bodies, so please, don't touch eyes, noses or mouths unless you've just cleaned your hands.
- Remember to clean your hands again after having touched your face.

Tissues

- Use a tissue once, and then discard it immediately. Don't pop it in your pocket.
- Tissues are also useful for opening doors and turning handles.

Elbows and knuckles

- The fingers, palms and skin creases are easy places for bugs to hide and tend to end up in on our faces, in our eyes, noses and mouths. So, don't touch if you can help it.
- In times like these, use your elbows or knuckles to press lift buttons, stabilise yourself on escalators, push open doors or use lever handles.

Face Masks

- Don't use face masks unless you are sick or been advised by a health care professional to do so (see below – caring for someone who is sick). Masks are needed for health care professionals, and there are fears that we are running low on supplies.
- If you have a cold or sniffle, wear a face mask. But as always, if you are unwell then you should stay home.
- Face masks can be a breeding ground for germs after about thirty minutes and won't protect you from much unless they have a rating of N95 or greater.

Social distancing

- Social distancing can slow the spread of this disease.
 - Practice good hand and cough sneeze hygiene.
 - Don't handshake or initiate physical greetings.
 - Clean shared high-touch surfaces, such as tables, benches, doorknobs, toilet buttons, light switches.
 - Increase fresh air by opening windows, adjusting air conditioning and getting outside (safely).
 - Consider travel and attendance gatherings that may be crowded.

- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Hold meetings via Zoom, teleconferences phone calls.
- Hold essential meetings outside in the open air if possible.
- Use hand sanitisers for all staff and workers.
- Limit food handling and shared food.

Going to the doctor or the health clinic

- If you do get sick with flu like symptoms, call your doctor or health clinic and tell them you need to see them before you visit.
- They will give you advice on what to do and how to make a visit that is safe for you and for others.
- There are virus / fever clinics set up near large hospitals. Please follow the directions to these clinics.

Testing

- Please know, testing is not available to all those requesting tests.
- There is a world-wide shortage on the tests, and clinicians are using sound reasoning as to why they test some and not others.
- In short, you will only be tested if your doctor decides you meet the criteria:
 - If have returned from overseas in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever.
 - If you have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness with or without fever.
 - If you have severe community-acquired pneumonia and there is no clear cause.
 - If you are a healthcare worker who works directly with patients and you have a respiratory illness and a fever.

After testing

- It may take a few days for the test results to come back.
- If you have serious symptoms you will be kept in hospital and isolated from other people to prevent the virus spreading.
- If your doctor says you are well enough to go home while you wait for your test results, you should:
 - self-isolate at home and do not physically attend work or university (but if you're well you can do things via the remote system).
 - protect yourself and others.

If you are told to self-isolate

- You must self-isolate if:
 - you have COVID-19.
 - you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
 - you arrived in Australia after midnight on 15 March 2020.

How to self-isolate

- The current advice is that self-isolation lasts for 14 days.
- You must stay at home to prevent the possible spread of the virus to other people.
- See specific advice for self-isolation if you become unwell through your doctor or health clinic, or via the many reliable public health sources.
- If you are told to self-isolate you must:

- Not go to public places such as work, classes, shopping centres or other public environments with lots of people.
- Ask for food and other necessities to be left at your front door.
- Don't receive visitors — only people who live with you should be in your home.
- Wear a mask if you have to go out (for example to seek medical attention).
- Stay in touch by phone and online with your family and friends.
- Let the university know if you are told to self-isolate.
- It is safe for you to go into your garden or courtyard. If you live in an apartment or similar, you can still go into the garden but you should wear a surgical mask to minimise risk to others. You should also move quickly through common areas and avoid touching any surfaces.
- When in isolation, monitor yourself for symptoms.
 - If you get sick, you will need to contact the health services and seek their advice.
 - If you become suddenly unwell and need urgent treatment, call 000.
- Managing isolation
 - Being in isolation for 14 days can be stressful and lonely.
 - Stay in touch with family members, workmates and friends via telephone, email or social media.
 - Keep up normal daily routines, such as eating well and exercise. If it's a workday, get dressed for work and take your usual breaks. Make sure you turn off the work at the usual time.

If someone at home is sick

- You should care for them whilst by following advice of healthcare professionals.
- Make sure that you clean frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Keep your hands clean and try to reduce the contact the sick person has with the outside world until they are cleared of infection.
- The GP will also tell you how to use a face mask at close quarters with the sick person.
- You should also seek advice on whether you should remain at home rather than coming into the work place.

The Coronavirus Health Information Line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
Call 1800 020 080

If you become suddenly seriously ill, or you have trouble breathing, call 000.

Please take care of yourselves, care for each other, and do your best to follow the above instructions. Stay open, and keep connected to each other. We are all here to help each other through these times.

Warm regards,

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Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Services and Strategy

This information was correct at the time of publication (20 March 2020). Refer to the following website for up to date information: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/study/coronavirus-infection-university-of-sydney-advice.html>