

Introduction

This toolbox talk is about what to do as the Coronavirus (aka COVID-19) spreads through New Zealand and what you can do to protect yourself, your family and the people around you.

The most up-to-date information for New Zealand is at the [Ministry of Health website](#).

The disease

COVID-19 is a new contagious illness that can affect the lungs and airways; it is caused by a type of coronavirus. Early information out of China, where COVID-19 first started, shows that some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes.

It spreads through tiny droplets of saliva or body fluids spread by such things as talking, sneezing, kissing and coughing. The disease can survive on surfaces such as benchtops and door handles for a number of hours and can then be picked up from there which is why washing your hands is very important.

Signs and symptoms

Some people get a very mild form of the disease but it can kill some people quite quickly, especially if they have diabetes or heart disease.

The signs and symptoms are:



A high temperature.
(At least 38°C)



Coughing



Breathing problems

Milder symptoms can be helped with normal medicines but if there is trouble breathing people may need to go to hospital.

If you have these symptoms call the Ministry of Health's special COVID-19 number on **0800 358 5453 at any time**. Or call your doctor, but don't go in without warning them. We can't have doctors getting infected as they will have to go into isolation.

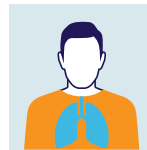
Most of the deaths are from fluid building up in the lungs so people can't breathe. Only about one in 100 people are dying but because it is so easy to spread, this could amount to a lot of people throughout the whole country. And the death rate is much higher in the elderly. The only good thing so far is that almost no children have died from the disease.

Prevention

There is no cure or vaccine yet so preventing the spread is the best defence.



A face mask won't stop the virus, but it does help stop people touching their face to avoid any virus on their hands going into their mouths or eyes.



Because it attacks the lungs, if you smoke, stop now. There's never been a better time!



Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs and railings.



Wash your hands. Ordinary soap is even better than expensive hand sanitisers. A 20 second wash with soap will dissolve the virus's protective coating. Keep plenty of soap, water and disposable handtowels on site.



Stay home if you are sick. The Ministry of Health wants people suspected of having the virus to stay home and quarantine themselves for 14 days so make sure you have enough supplies to last that long. If one of your team is sick, send them home.



Cough into your elbow, not your hands. This helps stop the spread.



If you have been in contact with someone who has the disease, assume you may have it and stay home. Stopping the spread is our best weapon to stop our medical system getting swamped.

Self-isolation

If you are showing signs of being unwell or have recently arrived or returned from overseas (or have been in contact with someone who has) you may be required to self-isolate. The situation is evolving so please visit the [Ministry of Health website](#) for the most up-to-date information.

Financial issues

Some employers may be able to cover the wages of workers being at home. Others may be able to offer support with food and other necessities.

If being at home causes financial hardship, contact Work and Income via phone or email to see about financial support.

Even if you don't think you qualify, call **0800 559 009** (Monday to Friday 7am–6pm, Saturday 8am – 1pm) to check for eligibility. There may be other options available and they will have suggestions.

Because of the outbreak, the usual two-week stand-down between when a benefit is approved and when it starts has been wiped and from March 23 payments begin as soon as a benefit is approved.

[Work and Income](#) can also help with food and clothing and accommodation costs if you have to move. (This may need to be paid back depending on the situation.)