



**FIRE +
RESCUE**

COVID-19 INFORMATION FOR STAFF

MARCH 2020

Fact Sheets
Health and Safety Branch

COVID-19 FACT SHEET

ABOUT COVID-19

COVID-19 VIRUS

COVID-19 Coronavirus is a respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus. On 12 March 2020, the [World Health Organization](#) declared COVID-19 virus a global pandemic. This declaration does not change the characteristics of the disease, nor is this calculated on a threshold number of cases or deaths, instead it is because it is associated with concerns over the transmittable geographical spread. The WHO declares a pandemic when a new disease for which people do not have immunity, spreads globally, promoting all countries to work collaboratively to prepare and implement preventative and control measures to mitigate the spread of this virus.

NSW Health is continuing to respond to cases, suspect or confirmed, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Internal Resources

- FRNSW COVID-19 advice: [Coronavirus toolkit](#)
- Email specific FRNSW health concerns to : coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au
- FRNSW contact email address Coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au
- General HR/Payroll enquiries: HR.Payroll@fire.nsw.gov.au
- Industrial issues arising: ircorrespondence@fire.nsw.gov.au
- IT support: ServiceDesk@fire.nsw.gov.au

External resources

- [COVID-19 FAQs](#)
- [Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus COVID-19](#)
- [NSW Health](#)
- [Australian Government - Department of Health](#)
- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [Public Health Unit](#) or ring 1300 066 055
- HealthDirect 1800 022 222
- The National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080

The potential spread of COVID-19 may be stressful and may leave you and your families feeling concerned. There are a range of support services to assist in managing stress and anxiety including:

- Wellbeing Coordinator and peer support: 0292653910 or 0448 295 725
- FRNSW Chaplain: 0418 869 280
- Employee Assistance Program: 1300 360 364
- Or externally
- Lifeline: 131114
- NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511
- Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au 1300 224635
- SANE Australia: www.sane.org 1800 17 72 63
- Black Dog: <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au>
- <https://preview.nsw.gov.au/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

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TRANSMISSION & PERSONAL RISK

HOW IS COVID-19 TRANSMITTED?

COVID-19 virus is now thought to be spread through:

- close contact with an infectious person, including hands
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include respiratory symptoms such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath and/or fever. 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.

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 the safe period of 14 days. The World Health Organisation (WHO) have not confirmed a timeframe for the virus to live outside the body on surfaces but are estimating 5 to 7 hours.

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CONTACT WITH A SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19

If you come into contact with a suspected case of COVID-19 (inv:

PERFORM HAND HYGIENE BEFORE DONNING PPE INCLUDING EYE PROTECTION, NITRILE GLOVES AND SCBA. P2 MASKS AND EYE PROTECTION CAN BE USED IF IT IS DECIDED THAT SCBA IS NOT REQUIRED.

IMMEDIATELY CONTACT

NSW Health 1300 066 055 for assessment who will help identify type of contact and subsequent risk and if post exposure action is required. If isolation is recommended, follow suspect case flow chart

FireCOM to request an Ambulance and handover to paramedics on arrival. FireCOM will ensure the incident is logged in appropriate notifications are made.

DURING THE INCIDENT

Isolate the patient as best you can until NSW Ambulance can transfer the patient to hospital. Treat patients with respect, compassion and dignity and maintain patient confidentiality.

Use standard contact and airborne transmission precautions, including SCBA and nitrile gloves. P2 masks and eye protection can be used if it is decided that SCBA is not required. Refer to the FRNSW Infection Prevention and Control Manual and the Coronavirus toolkit.

AFTER THE INCIDENT

Remove PPE, nitrile gloves and dispose, perform hand hygiene, remove eyewear and mask, then perform hand hygiene again

Decon PPE and clean any contacted/contaminated equipment and surfaces with water and detergent, dry, then apply disinfectant, washing hands after all PPE is removed

REPORT

Health and Safety Branch

NIENMS

Chain of Command

NSW Health Public Health Unit's Response

COVID-19 is a public health notifiable disease. If your pathology tests are positive, NSW Health Public Health will contact you to provide information and advice. During office hours, you can contact the appropriate local Public Health Unit for further information or ring 1300 066 055 who will assist you.

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IF YOU DEVELOP FLU LIKE SYMPTOMS

IF YOU DEVELOP FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS
(FEVER AND/OR RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS SUCH AS
COUGH, RUNNY NOSE OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH)

DON'T COME TO WORK AND ISOLATE

CALL YOUR GP OR HEALTH DIRECT 1800 022 222 AND ASK FOR ADVICE REGARDING THE NEED FOR SCREENING (SWAB TESTING) AND FURTHER ISOLATION. IF NO SCREENING IS REQUIRED, RETURN TO WORK WHEN ALL SYMPTOMS HAVE SUBSIDED.

IF YOU DEVELOP FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS AT WORK
(FEVER AND/OR RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS SUCH AS
COUGH, RUNNY NOSE OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH)

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

ISOLATE and report on sick list, Call your GP, or Health Direct on 1800 022 222. Ask for advice regarding screening (swab testing) and further isolation

Contact your commander or supervisor

Exposed vehicles and equipment should be cleaned in accordance with cleaning vehicles, equipment, stations and work areas. Staff DO NOT NEED to self isolate unless they are or become symptomatic

IF COVID-19 SCREENING IS RECOMMENDED FOR FF

Crew to self monitor symptoms but continue at work

FF to remain isolated for 14 days or until screening test is negative

If crew member becomes symptomatic, self-isolate until screening results are received

CONTACT SUPERVISOR

If symptomatic FF's screening test result is positive

Supervisor to contact all crew or staff in close contact to remain isolated for 14 days post exposure

All identified close contact crew to submit NIIENM form

Protect those living with you. Refer to the Isolation advice on the FRNSW Toolkit

If symptomatic FF's screening test result is negative

CONTACT SUPERVISOR

Supervisor to contact all crew and Health and Safety Branch

If COVID-19 screening test is NOT recommended for symptomatic FF

FF to remain isolated until all symptoms subside as per normal sick leave process

Crew to self monitor for symptoms but continue at work as per normal

If crew member become symptomatic, self-isolate until symptoms have subsided as per normal sick leave process

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. 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, but you can remain at work.**

HOW IS COVID-19 VIRUS 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. Testing for COVID-19 is done in public health laboratories for those deemed to fit the criteria as a possible case. For results to be confirmed takes approximately 3-4 days.

If you are deemed suitable for COVID-screening, you should contact the collection centre prior to attending for specimen collection. Some hospitals will be offering screening and specific COVID-19 clinics are being arranged. Your GP or Public Health contact will provide you with this information

WHAT TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE FOR COVID-19?

There is no treatment for coronavirus, but medical care can treat most of the symptoms. Early diagnosis and general supportive care are important. 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. With an individual with other ongoing health issues, recovery may take longer. People who have serious symptoms with complications can be cared for in hospital.

People with underlying illnesses make them more vulnerable to respiratory disease, including those with diabetes, chronic lung disease, kidney failure, people with suppressed immune systems and older people are at a higher risk of serious disease. Antibiotics do not work on viruses. Please note, there is no COVID-19 vaccine nor antiviral medication available at this stage.

Surgical masks in the community are only helpful in preventing people who have a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus disease from spreading it to others by droplet. If you are well, you do not need to wear a surgical mask as there is little evidence supporting the widespread use of surgical masks in healthy people to prevent transmission in public.

- Surgical masks are not useful or appropriate for people who are not sick
- Surgical masks may increase the risk of infection by repeatedly touching face or eyes

Though the [influenza](#) vaccine will be available April/May 2020, this does not provide immunity for COVID-19. NSW Health stress the importance of having the influenza vaccine to avoid risk of co-infection. Optimal vaccine protection against influenza occurs within the first 3 to 4 months following vaccination and the peak influenza season is between June – September and revaccination is not routinely recommended.

HOW TO REDUCE EXPOSURE TO COVID-19?

COVID-19 is spread through contaminated droplets spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.

Standard recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include:

- frequent cleaning of hands using soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub and dry well
- avoid touching your face,
- covering the nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue when coughing and sneezing
- avoid close contact with anyone who has a fever and cough.
- Do not come to work when you are sick.

Hand Hygiene

- Wash your hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds, with lots of rubbing together of the hands, front, back and between the fingers and then dry well
- Or use an alcohol-based hand rub vigorously and allow to air dry

When you should wash your hands?

- After any contact with others who are unwell
- After you have visited the toilet
- When starting and finishing work
- Before and after donning gloves and after removing gloves
- Before and after removing facial and eye protection
- After removing PPE
- Before and after direct patient contact
- After touching inanimate object which are likely to be contaminated
- After touching animals
- Before you unpack the dishwasher or put away drying kitchen utensils
- Before during and after you prepare food
- After contact with any surfaces
- After you have been on public transport
- Before touching your face
- After coughing or sneezing
- When hands are visibly dirty
- After handling animals or animal waste

Respiratory Hygiene

Everyone regardless of signs of infection, should always practice respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette

- Cover the nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue when coughing and sneezing
- Dispose of the cloth/tissue in a rubbish bin after use
- Perform hand hygiene after coughing and sneezing and handling used tissues

Taking medication to block your symptoms or to try to reduce the risk of being contagious, is a marketing strategy not a health strategy.

Ensure Appliances, Stations and Work Areas are always cleaned and maintained

In accordance with our normal procedures:

- Ensure the appropriate level of PPE be applied and a designated area for equipment cleaning is specified prior to cleaning
- If you are working in an office, wipe down your desk with antibacterial wipes at least on arrival and when you are leaving your desk
- Use water and detergent (diluted as per the manufacturer's instructions) in a cleaning bucket with disposable cleaning cloths
- clean appliances and vehicles in accordance with [SIMS worksheets](#)
- Avoid the use of cleaning methods which aerosolise or disperse microbes into the air (sweeping or spray and wipe cleaning methods)
- When cleaning is complete, wash buckets and mops with warm water and detergent and store in a manner to facilitate drying. Maintain cleaning equipment in a clean and hygienic condition. Discard cleaning cloths after use.

Visitors to the Station, Office or Work Area

- Ensure only essential visitors entering FRNSW sites and work locations follow hand hygiene process
- Wash hands before entering and wash hands before leaving
- Clean work areas regularly



DO NOT COME TO WORK IF YOU ARE SICK

WHAT ISOLATION IS REQUIRED FOR SUSPECTED COVID-19 CASES?

There should only be people in the home who are essential for providing care for the person who is under isolation and those who cannot find alternative accommodation.

If you are asked to self-isolate:

- Refer to the NSW Health [self-isolation fact sheet](#)

If you are sharing the home with others, where possible, you should:

- remain separated from others
- maintain strict hand hygiene
- wear a surgical mask when you are in the same room as another person
- use a separate bathroom, if available.
- avoid shared or communal areas and wear a surgical mask when moving through these areas
- clean household surfaces frequently wearing disposable gloves.

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.

C2020-01 EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENTS DURING COVID-19

On 13 March 2020 the NSW Government issued a new policy titled [C2020-01 Employment Arrangements during COVID-19](#), that will assist employees manage situations affecting them in relation to the Coronavirus COVID-19.

Points to note include:

- If you are sick, normal sick leave arrangements apply, please take sick leave and do not come to work. If your sick leave runs out, additional special sick leave may be granted on a case by case basis.
- If employees can work in different ways, they may be able to work from alternate locations, including home. For operational personnel, this may include working at different stations, and for those living in regional locations and working in the GSA, this may include working at permanent or retained stations. This would be assessed on a case by case basis in consultation with your Duty Commander. There may also be situations where the employee is required to work in a different role or different Agency.
- Where the employee is working from home but also providing care to a family member, they will ordinarily be required to balance those responsibilities. If for valid reasons they are simply unable to do both, up to 20 calendar days of paid special leave will be made available. This will allow the employee to attend work at times when the care of the family member has been passed to someone else. In a situation where special leave is accessed, the employee will be required to explain the circumstances in the Statutory Declaration that is used for Carers' Leave upon returning to work.
- Similarly, if you are validly unable to work because schools etc are closed and children need to be cared for, the special leave of up to 20 calendar days could be accessed at times no other care arrangements can be made (e.g. Your partner is working during the day). This would allow Firefighters working 24 hours shifts (for example) to attend work for part of their shift at a time when the care of the children has been passed to someone else. Again, personnel may be able to report for duty at other locations, on a case by case basis.
- Also, if you have to rely on public transport or air travel to attend work, and these have been disrupted, you should consider any other options you might have to attend, such as working at other locations, again on a case by case basis in discussion with your Manager / Duty Commander. However, if alternatives are not available, the 20 calendar days of special leave can also be made available.
- In the case of accessing special leave due to having to care for children or transport disruption mentioned above, the employee will need to provide a written explanation to their Manager / Duty Commander of the particular circumstances that justify the taking of special leave.

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EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENT (CONT.)

As per NSW Health's Chief Medical Officer Dr Kerry Chant's current advice, employees have an obligation to self-isolate if they have been overseas in the last 14 days and develop flu like symptoms such as fever, cough, runny nose and/or shortness of breath. They are also obliged to self-isolate if they have been in close contact with a person who is suspected or confirmed of having COVID-19. The self-isolation period is the safe incubation period of 14 days (or in the case of suspected COVID-19, when that suspected person is medically cleared by a screening test for COVID-19 being negative) and employees should advise Fire and Rescue NSW as soon as they can of such a situation. If Fire and Rescue NSW, in the particular circumstances, directs the employee not to attend work and alternative work can't be provided, the employee will be able to access up to 20 calendar days of special leave.

As employees are very aware, Fire and Rescue NSW has an ongoing responsibility to provide emergency coverage across NSW. In responding to circumstances created by the COVID-19, it may be necessary to move staff and/or appliances to different locations and temporarily take a station off-line. If for example a firefighter was tested positive for COVID-19, that station would be taken temporarily off-line to ensure disinfectant processes could be undertaken before ordinary work resumes. In that case, the Platoon working in close contact with the Firefighter in question, NSW Public Health will advise the period of time required to self-isolate which will be determined by screening results.

An updated Safety Bulletin was released 13 March 2020, with clear instructions for firefighter's response re contact with COVID-19. The Coronavirus toolkit on the intranet, has also been updated.

For further information:

- In the case of general COVID-19 advice: the Coronavirus toolkit re preventative measures:
<http://intranet.nswfire.nsw.gov.au/toolkit/organisation-wide/health/medical/coronavirus>
- In the case of specific health concerns: coronavirus.info@fire.nsw.gov.au
- In the case of general HR/Payroll enquiries: HR.Payroll@fire.nsw.gov.au
- In the case of Industrial issues arising: ircorrespondence@fire.nsw.gov.au
- In the case of IT support: ServiceDesk@fire.nsw.gov.au