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Coronavirus COVID-19 daily update

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This Chief Health Officer update is intended to provide clinicians and the Victorian public with information about the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Victoria as well as relevant public health response activities in Victoria. Chief Health Officer Alerts will continue to be issued when there are changes to the public health advice related to COVID-19.

31/03/2020

What's new?

Developments in the outbreak

- As of 1pm, 31 March 2020, Victoria has 917 total confirmed cases, 29 people are in hospitals including four people in intensive care. Four people have died. Almost two thirds of cases are directly linked to overseas travel, and 32 were locally acquired with no know link to overseas travel or another confirmed case. In total, 291 people have recovered.
- Of the total 917 cases, there have been 728 in metropolitan Melbourne and 173 in regional Victoria. A number of cases remain under investigation.
- This week, Australia's total exceeded 4000 cases. That is expected to increase significantly in coming weeks unless people stay at home.
- Doctors, nurses, midwives and mental health professionals can deliver temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule and Department of Veterans' Affairs items via telehealth, provided those services are bulk billed.
- Doctors are encouraged to remind all patients that they should stay at home unless going to medical appointments or performing essential tasks.
- If testing health care workers, doctors are reminded to clearly mark pathology slips with 'HCW' to ensure the swabs can be easily identified for priority testing.


- Doctors are reminded to ensure they include a mobile contact number on pathology slips for patients who have been tested.
- Up-to-date [epidemiological data](#)  is available on our website.
- Physical (social) distancing measures should be consistently applied, if at all possible, including in clinical settings. The rule of 1 person for every 4 square metres must be maintained to ensure a safe physical distance.

Current directions arising from the declared state of emergency

- A [stay at home direction](#) was signed on 30 March 2020, ordering anyone in Victoria to stay at their usual place of residence, other than to work or study, buy essential goods or services, medical care or compassionate needs or exercise in accordance with public gathering guidelines. This direction replaces the Prohibited Gatherings direction.
- A [restricted activity direction](#) was signed on 30 March 2020, replacing the non-essential activity directions given on 25 March 2020. The new direction bans escort agencies and closes playgrounds, skateparks and outdoor communal gym equipment.
- A direction [to detain](#) all people arriving in Victoria on or after midnight was signed on 28 March 2020. This direction allows anyone arriving from overseas to be placed in mandatory quarantine for 14 days in a nominated accommodation facility. This direction supersedes the previous [airport and cruise ship directions](#), which have now been revoked.
- A direction for [non-essential activity \(No 2\)](#) was signed on 26 March 2020. This direction prohibits the operation of non-essential businesses and undertakings to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These directions update the non-essential activity direction from 25 March.
- A [prohibited gatherings directions](#) was signed on 25 March 2020. This direction replaces the direction given on 22 March, adding two new categories, namely social sports gatherings and weddings and funerals.
- An [isolation \(diagnosis\) direction](#) was signed on 25 March 2020. This direction requires anyone diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) to isolate at home or another suitable location to slow the spread of the disease.
- A direction for [hospital visitors](#) was signed on 23 March 2020. This direction prohibits non-essential visits to hospitals.
- This follows a direction for aged care, which was signed on 21 March 2020. The [Aged Care Directions](#) make provision for restricted access to residential aged care facilities to limit the spread of COVID-19 within a particularly vulnerable population.

Key messages


Quarantine for Australians arriving in Melbourne from overseas

- People aged over 70, aged over 60 with pre-existing conditions, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50 should stay home wherever possible for their own protection.
- As of midnight, 28 March 2020, all travellers arriving into Melbourne from overseas will be quarantined for two weeks in hotel rooms and other accommodation facilities.
- Interstate travellers can only return to their home states after fulfilling the mandatory 14-day quarantine requirements.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector refers to a series of four stages in terms of response. They describe changes in approach, priorities and areas of focus for the health sector as the pandemic continues. Currently Victoria is at Stage 2.
- These stages are different in terms of required action to the stages of restrictions on movement and contact.
- You will be notified as the state moves through the stages of the Pandemic Plan. You can find more information [here](#) .

Supporting healthcare workers

- It's everyone's responsibility to support essential healthcare workers – such as doctors and nurses – to stay at work during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- Healthcare workers may need extra help to ensure their children have care so they can work during this period.
- Where possible, partners of essential healthcare workers – who are not healthcare workers themselves – should support them to continue working by taking care of children.
- Older people – such as grandparents – and other at-risk groups should not be engaged as carers to reduce their risk of infection.
- Victoria has expanded its dedicated contact tracing services. From 26 March messages to close contacts are sent via a new platform called Whispr, which requires the person to respond back to the contact tracing team confirming they are isolating at home.
- Any healthcare or residential aged care worker with a fever or respiratory symptoms must be tested.

New Orders for Pharmacists and Prescription medications

- Two public health emergency orders came into effect on 26 March and can be found here: <http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2020/GG2020S158.pdf> 
 - Pharmacists can supply prescription medications without a prescription for one month in emergency circumstances except for Schedule 8 medicines.
 - Doctors prescribing Schedule 8 medicines for non-drug dependent patients will not be required to apply for a Schedule 8 treatment permit for the next six months, but instead check SafeScript.
 - Practitioners will need to apply for Schedule 8 treatment permits for drug dependent patients, including opioid replacement therapy.
- During the pandemic, health practitioners should take all reasonable steps to access SafeScript, as it is a very effective in providing up-to-date information about a patient's

prescribing and dispensing history.

More information

Clinical information

[Health services and general practice - coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Consumer information

[About Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - information for the general public](#)

[World Health Organization - health topic - Coronavirus](#) 

[Smartraveller website](#) 

Contacts

A public information hotline is provided by Health Direct – 1800 675 398.

Medical practitioners needing clinical information or to notify suspected or confirmed cases can contact the Department of Health and Human Services Communicable Diseases Section on 1300 651 160 (24 hours).

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Updated on 01/04/2020

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Address: 50 Lonsdale Street
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3000

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The department acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of

the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

The department is committed to safe and inclusive work places, policies and services for people of LGBTIQ communities and their families.



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