



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES

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Frequently Asked Questions: 2019 Novel Coronavirus

What is 2019 novel coronavirus (2019 n-CoV)?

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses, with six of these viruses known to cause a range of illnesses from the common cold to the more serious Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). 2019 novel coronavirus was discovered in early January 2020 after an unusual cluster of pneumonia cases was noted in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China.

This new virus affects the respiratory system and causes mild to severe disease. It has resulted in death in some people. The current information is that most of the people who died were elderly or had underlying medical conditions.

As this is a newly discovered virus there are still many questions to be answered, including where it came from, how severe a disease it is, how easily it spreads among people, and who is most at risk of infection. The current information is that it spreads through droplets from coughing, and close unprotected contact with an infected person (e.g. shaking hands).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of 2019-nCoV are respiratory symptoms that are similar to other respiratory diseases like influenza. Having the symptoms does not necessarily mean you have 2019-nCoV. The symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other cold-like symptoms.

What should I do if I become unwell with 2019-nCoV symptoms when returning to Fiji from travel in areas known to have an outbreak?

If travellers returning become unwell they should seek medical attention, and advise the treating clinician of their recent travel. Please call the health facility ahead of time so health staff are aware of your symptoms and travel history before you arrive.

What is the risk of international spread?

The outbreak started in Wuhan in Hubei province China, with cases now being reported from other parts of China, and other countries. It remains to be seen whether transmission continues within countries outside China.

In our interconnected world of international air travel it is difficult to prevent the spread of a disease like this. What is important is how a country's health system responds once cases have been identified.

What is the status in Fiji?

There are currently no suspected or confirmed cases in Fiji.

What is the Ministry of Health and Medical Services doing?

The Fijian Ministry of Health and Medical Services is following advice from the World Health Organisation and working across agencies to manage the risks of novel coronavirus and preparing for the prevention of spread of this newly identified virus.

Our response is multilayered with focus on preventing spread in Fiji through:

- Early identification of cases at the international borders and in the community
- Targeted awareness and monitoring of high-risk persons (e.g. those who have travelled to an outbreak area)
- Awareness for the general public to reduce their risk
- Readiness of our health staff and facilities to respond to any cases.

International border control is one part of our response, and we are working with the relevant stakeholders, including airport authorities and airlines, to enhance existing mechanisms for detecting ill travellers at the international point of entry.

There are no direct flights from Wuhan to Fiji. However, we do have flights from Hong Kong and Singapore that may serve as connections from passengers from Wuhan. Therefore, we are introducing additional health screening measures for passengers disembarking from flights that originate in Hong Kong and Singapore. These measures may be adapted as the situation changes.

Border health screening may not absolutely prevent cases from entering Fiji because a person who has been exposed to the virus may be completely well for up to 14 days before they have any symptoms of the disease. Therefore, we have also alerted our healthcare workers and emphasized that they must ask about history of travel for anyone that presents with symptoms. Early detection of cases and rapid response will help prevent spread in Fiji.

What can you do?

Fijians are strongly advised against any travel to the Hubei province in China. This includes the cities of Wuhan, Huanggang, Ezhou, Chibi, Xiantao, Zhijiang, Qianjiang, Xianning, Huagshi, and Enshi. This advice may be reviewed as the situation develops.

If you are traveling to China please:

- Avoid visiting 'wet' markets that sell live and dead animals out in the open,
- Avoid unprotected contact with live wild or farm animals
- Avoid contact with persons with flu like symptoms
- Ensure that you only eat meat or eggs that are thoroughly cooked,
- Practice hand and respiratory hygiene (described below).

There is currently no vaccine against this new disease, but we advise Fijians to practice the following hygiene measures, which will also prevent other diseases:

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue, sleeve, or elbow when coughing or sneezing. Throw tissue into a close bin after use. Clean hands after coughing and sneezing and when caring for the sick
- Frequently clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand rub
- Avoid contact with persons with flu like symptoms

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services will continue to monitor the developing situation and adapt our advice accordingly.

For more information and updates on the 2019 novel coronavirus please visit the World Health Organisation's website: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>