healthdirect

Free Australian health advice you can count on.

Medical problem? Call 1800 022 222. If you need urgent medical help, call triple zero immediately

healthdirect Australia is a free service where you can talk to a nurse or doctor who can help you know what to do.

Symptoms of COVID-19 and when to seek medical advice

10-minute read

☰ | 🔊 **Listen** | ▶

> ⚠ **If you develop symptoms such as severe shortness of breath or chest pain, call triple zero (000) immediately. Tell the call handler and the paramedics on arrival if you have COVID-19.**

On this page

Quick read and other languages

Learn about mild, moderate and severe COVID-19 symptoms, and when to seek medical advice. Also available in **15 languages**.

[**COVID QUICK READ**]

How will I know if my symptoms are mild, moderate or severe?

Mild symptoms

The following symptoms are considered mild:

- mild upper respiratory tract symptoms, such as a congested or runny nose, sneezing, or a scratchy or sore throat
- cough with no difficulty breathing
- new aches and pains, or lethargy or weakness *without* shortness of breath
- mild headache
- mild fever that responds to treatment
- loss of smell or taste
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- occasional vomiting or diarrhoea
- no symptoms at all
- not drinking as much fluid (such as water) as usual in the last 24 hours

Moderate symptoms

The following symptoms are considered moderate:

- shortness of breath while walking around, such as noticeably having to breathe more heavily while walking around the house
- persistent fever above 38°C that's not responding to treatment

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- persistent worsening cough that regularly produces mucus
- struggling to get out of bed and feeling dizzy or weak
- reduced fluid intake (drinking) over the last 24 hours (but more than half the normal intake)
- reduced urine output ('weeing') over the last 24 hours (producing less urine, but more than half the normal amount)
- vomiting or diarrhoea (more than 4 times in the last 24 hours, of either)

Severe symptoms

The following symptoms are considered severe:

- breathlessness at rest and/or you're unable to speak in sentences
- being unconscious, fainting or drowsy
- skin turning blue or pale
- cold and clammy, or pale and mottled, skin
- pain or pressure in the chest lasting more than 10 minutes
- confusion
- passing no urine ('wee') or a lot less urine than usual
- coughing up blood

If you are experiencing any severe symptoms call triple zero (000) for an ambulance and tell the ambulance staff that you have COVID-19.

Severe symptoms in children

- high-pitched wheezing sound while breathing (stridor)
- gurgling or grunting while breathing
- working very hard to breathe, or using chest or abdominal (tummy) muscles to breathe
- being too breathless to speak or feed, or long pauses between breaths
- nostril flaring
- turning blue around the mouth or lips
- head bobbing
- skin feels unusually cold and sweaty
- their skin colour looks 'patchy' or very pale
- unconscious, drowsy, or floppy or limp
- they've not had many fluids (such as water) in the last 24 hours (less than half their normal intake)
- they've not produced much urine ('wee') in the last 24 hours (less than half their normal amount)

If your child has any of these symptoms call triple zero (000) right now and ask for an ambulance.

If your symptoms worsen, you or your caregivers should call your GP for advice. If you can't reach your GP straight away, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance and tell the ambulance staff that you have COVID-19.

If you go to a hospital emergency department (ED), contact it beforehand to tell the staff that you have COVID-19. When you arrive, wear a surgical mask at all times and tell staff straight away that you have COVID-19.

> **CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS** — Use the **COVID-19 Symptom and Antiviral Eligibility Checker** to find out if you need medical help.

What should I do if I develop COVID-19 symptoms?

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19 — even if they are mild — you should get tested and stay at home until you receive a negative test result, regardless of your vaccination status.

If you have had contact with someone who has COVID-19 and develop symptoms, you should get tested.

Some people who have a confirmed case of COVID-19 may be able to get COVID-19 medication.

You can also use the COVID-19 Symptom and Antiviral Eligibility Checker to find out if you need to get tested or seek medical help. If the checker tells you to contact your GP, describe your symptoms and any contact you have had with a person with confirmed COVID-19.

You can also attend a COVID-19 clinic in your area to get tested or call the Australian Government's National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 for information about COVID-19.

When should I seek medical advice?

Most people can manage COVID-19 at home. Those who have mild COVID-19 symptoms may be advised that it is safe for them to manage their symptoms at home instead of going to hospital.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has developed a guide for people managing COVID at home. It includes a COVID-19 action plan and a diary that you can use to track your symptoms.

Ask yourself the following questions 3 times a day (morning, afternoon and night) — am I able to:

- get my own food?
- drink (for example, water) without any help?

- go to the toilet normally?
- take my regular medication?

If you answer 'no' to any of these questions, call your GP.

You should also contact your GP if you feel dizzy or lightheaded or your symptoms start to worsen.

You should contact your GP or health service if you're pregnant, have any chronic conditions or have any concerns about your health. Your doctor may be able to assess you over the phone or by video.

If you need to attend a medical centre in person, you must:

- Contact the medical centre beforehand to tell staff that you have COVID-19. You may ask for a telehealth consultation if they have this service.
- Take a private vehicle or walk if practical. You shouldn't take public transport, taxis or ride-share cars.
- Wear a face mask while travelling and when in the practice. Others in the vehicle should also wear a face mask.
- Tell staff straight away that you have COVID-19, and follow their instructions.

If you are experiencing any severe symptoms call triple zero (000) for an ambulance and tell the ambulance staff that you have COVID-19.

How soon after exposure to COVID-19 do symptoms appear?

The COVID-19 incubation period, which is the time between when a person is exposed to the virus and when their symptoms first appear, ranges from 1 to 14 days. Most people develop symptoms 5 to 6 days after being in contact with a person with COVID-19.

When is a person with COVID-19 infectious, and can they transmit the virus to others before symptoms appear?

If you have COVID-19, you are currently considered infectious generally from 48 hours before your symptoms develop (or before your positive test if you don't have any symptoms).

If you still have symptoms, you may still be contagious. However, people with COVID-19 can still transmit the virus whether they have symptoms or not.

People who still have acute respiratory symptoms after 7 days are still considered infectious. Acute symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat.

## How is COVID-19 different from the flu (influenza)?

COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2. The seasonal flu is caused by different types of influenza virus.

Both diseases are infections and can cause respiratory symptoms, such as a sore throat, runny nose and cough, as well as fever.

However, there are some differences:

- Influenza often includes muscle pains and headache, while these symptoms are less common in COVID-19.
- So far, severe COVID-19 has mainly affected older age groups and people with chronic illnesses. But severe cases of the flu can sometimes make otherwise healthy people, children and pregnant women very sick too.

Understand the symptoms

		COVID-19	Cold	Flu
	Fever	Sometimes	Rare	Common
	Cough	Common	Common	Common
	Sore throat	Common	Common	Sometimes
	Shortness of breath	Sometimes	No	No
	Fatigue	Common	Sometimes	Common
	Loss of taste and/or smell	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
	Body aches/pain	Sometimes	No	Common
	Headache	Common	Common	Common
	Stuffy/runny nose	Common	Common	Sometimes
	Diarrhoea	Rare	No	Sometimes (in children)
	Sneezing	Common	Common	No
	Vomiting	Sometimes	Rare	Common in children / Rare in adults

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Source: Australian Department of Health and Aged Care

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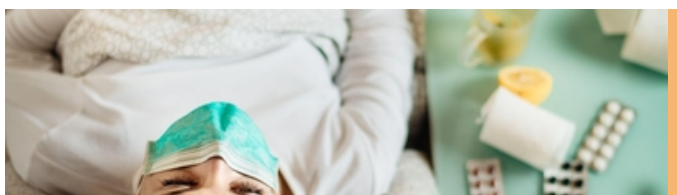
Treating symptoms at home

People with a mild case of COVID-19 can treat their symptoms in a similar way to how they treat a seasonal flu. Here's how to relieve symptoms at home.

How to monitor symptoms

If you're able to manage your COVID-19 at home, you might be asked to follow a management plan. Learn how to check your breathing rate, oxygen levels and heart rate.

Learn more here about the [development and quality assurance of healthdirect content](#).

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24 hour health advice you can count on ▯ 1800 022 222

We are a government-funded service, providing quality, approved health information and advice

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