COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Updated 15 May 2020

This information has been developed in response to the COVID-19 infectious respiratory disease pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, the most recently discovered coronavirus.

Public health measures and restrictions that were implemented by the Australian and New Zealand governments since mid-March 2020 have been successful in controlling the spread of COVID-19.

This information has been updated, following the easing of some restrictions in mid-May 2020.

What is COVID-19 and how does it spread?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections, including the common cold and more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The most recently discovered coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), causes coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in December 2019.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is assessing ongoing research on how COVID-19 is spread. Studies to date suggest that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is mainly spread through contact with respiratory droplets containing the virus.

COVID-19 can spread when someone:

- **Inhales droplets containing the virus when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes.**
- **Touches a person or surface that is contaminated with droplets containing the virus, then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter the body and cause illness.**

What precautions should people with immunodeficiencies take?

Most people with primary and secondary immunodeficiencies are immunocompromised and are therefore at greater risk of any respiratory infections. The precautions they take to prevent infections are consistent with the actions listed below, and they should follow the usual advice from their physician. Further information is available at www.allergy.org.au/patients/immunodeficiencies

What precautions should people with respiratory allergy and other allergies take?

Most people with allergic rhinitis (hay fever), eczema, food, insect or medication allergy are not immunocompromised and are therefore not considered to be at greater risk of any respiratory infections.

People with asthma are also not considered to be immunocompromised, however, asthma may sometimes be triggered by infections. People with asthma should already be aware of the need to avoid infections and what to do if they become unwell or come in contact with any infectious disease. They are advised to follow the usual advice from their physician. It is important that asthma is well controlled and that inhalers are used as directed by the treating doctor to reduce the impact of COVID-19 (and other infections) as much as possible.

Some allergic rhinitis and asthma symptoms may be similar to those caused by infections, so it is important to treat allergic rhinitis and asthma to prevent symptoms that could be mistaken for infections from viruses, such as such as colds, influenza and COVID-19.

Even if you are not immunocompromised it is vital that everyone follows the most recent government advice and restrictions, to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

What actions can reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections?

- **Hand hygiene is the top priority.** Regular and thorough hand washing with soap and water throughout the day, particularly after using the bathroom and before eating is vital for preventing infections. Alcohol-based hand-gel can be used to sanitise hands when soap and water isn't available. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Also avoid shaking hands or any other greeting that involves contact.
- **Respiratory hygiene is also a priority.** This involves covering the mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, then disposing of the used tissue immediately. It is also important to maintain at least 1.5 metre distance away from anyone, especially if they cough or sneeze.
- **Stay home if you are unwell.** If anyone has a fever, cough or breathing difficulty, they should stay home, seek medical attention (call in advance), and follow the local health authority instructions. Self-isolation is required if contact has been made with someone with COVID-19 symptoms, or symptoms develop following contact with someone who has COVID-19 (see details below). Quarantine of 14 days is required for people who have travelled from overseas, even if they feel well.
- **Follow government advice and restrictions.** It is important that everyone complies with government restrictions, which include the actions listed above and physical/social distancing measures.

When is self-isolation required?

Self-isolation is required if contact has been made with someone with COVID-19 symptoms, or symptoms develop following contact with someone who has COVID-19. Information on how to self-isolate is on the following websites:

www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-self-quarantine-for-coronavirus-covid-19

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation

Can the immune system be "boosted" against infections such as COVID-19?

Despite various claims, there are currently NO recommended supplements or other agents which have been proven in conventional medical studies to boost immunity against infections such as COVID-19.

Getting enough sleep, healthy eating, managing stress and regular exercise (whilst complying with government restrictions regarding social distancing) will optimise immune system function. By combining these measures with the actions listed above, this may help reduce spread of infections, including COVID-19.

Further information

The ASCIA COVID-19 webpage www.allergy.org.au/members/covid-19 is regularly reviewed and updated, with links to the following information:

ASCIA COVID-19 information | Information from other organisations and governments | Publications | COVID-19 and Telehealth | Medical product supply updates | IUIS COVID-19 Primary Immunodeficiency Survey | COVID–19 Global Rheumatology Alliance Registry | ASCIA COVID-19 Working Party | COVID-19 Symptom Checker | COVID-19 Dashboard