



Ministry of Health and Medical Services

COVID-19: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

1. What is the ‘new’ Coronavirus/ COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some infect people and are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. It is now called COVID-19, a new strain of coronavirus. It was detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

2. How dangerous is COVID-19?

As with other respiratory illnesses, infection with COVID-19 can cause mild symptoms including a runny nose, sore throat, cough, and fever. It can be more severe for some people and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. More rarely, the disease can be fatal. Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as, diabetes and heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.

3. Who can catch the virus?

People living or travelling in an area where the virus **is freely circulating** may be at risk of infection. Those most at risk are people who have recently traveled to countries where there have been outbreaks of COVID-19, or who have been living or working closely with those travelers, such as family members, co-workers or medical professionals caring for a patient infected with the virus.

4. Are there any cases of COVID-19 in the Solomon Islands?

Currently there is no confirmed COVID-19 in the Solomon Islands. The Government is focusing on keeping the virus out through restrictions at ports and airports to ensure travelers who have visited **restricted** countries in the past two weeks do not enter the country. Anyone travelling or intending to travel to and from Solomon Islands should familiarize themselves with the latest Travel Advisories and information related to travel on the following government websites: www.ndmo.gov.sb, www.commerce.gov.sb, www.visitsolomons.com.sb and www.customs.gov.sb.

5. What can the public do to prevent contracting and spreading COVID-19?

- **Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.**
- **Cover mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when coughing and sneezing** – dispose of the tissue immediately and clean your hands afterwards – this is because if you sneeze or cough into your hands, you may contaminate objects or people that you touch.
- **Keep your distance:** At least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and other people, particularly those who are coughing, sneezing and have a fever. When people

with the virus cough or sneeze they send small droplets containing the virus into the air. If you are too close, you can breathe in the virus.

- **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.** Hands touch many surfaces which can be contaminated with the virus and it's is easy to transfer the virus from the contaminated surface to yourself.
- **Avoid unnecessary overcrowding and social gathering.**

6. Should I wear a mask to protect myself?

Use a mask only if you have respiratory symptoms (coughing or sneezing), have suspected COVID-19 infection with mild symptoms, or are caring for someone with suspected COVID-19 infection. A suspected COVID-19 infection is linked to travel in areas where cases have been reported, or close contact with someone who has travelled in these areas and has become ill.

The use of masks is crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone (at home or in a health care facility).

Effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.

7. What are common symptoms of coronavirus?

Symptoms of coronavirus may include. Fever, Coughing. Sneezing and Shortness of breath

8. What if I think I have the virus?

Respiratory symptoms with fever can have a range of causes, and depending on your personal travel history and circumstances, COVID-19 *may* be one of them. If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. If you have traveled in an area where COVID-19 has been reported, or if you have been in close contact with someone with who has traveled to affected countries and has respiratory symptoms, call the Public Health Emergency Surveillance Unit on 23650 or 7522202, and avoid using public transport and keep your distance from other people (at least 1 metre).

If you have mild respiratory symptoms and no travel history to or within affected countries and no history of contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. Carefully practice basic respiratory and hand hygiene and stay home until you are recovered, if possible.

9. What's the difference between illness caused by COVID-19 and the flu or a cold?

People with COVID-19 infection, the flu, or a cold typically develop respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough and runny nose. Even though many symptoms are alike, they are caused by different viruses. Because of their similarities, it can be difficult to identify so we use laboratory tests to confirm if someone has COVID-19.

10. Is there medicine to treat COVID-19?

To date, there is no specific medicine to prevent or treat the new coronavirus. However, those infected should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe illness should receive care from a health provider.

The following measures will **NOT** protect you from the virus, and some can be harmful:

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Drinking traditional herbal teas
- Wearing many masks to maximize protection
- Taking self-medication such as antibiotics

11. What measures is the Solomon Islands Government taking to prepare for and respond to the threat of COVID-19?

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is:

- Working with Customs, Immigration and Biosecurity to enforce travel restrictions, screening and surveillance at international ports and airports
- Strengthening clinical and laboratory services
- Bringing in essential medical supplies
- Setting up quarantine, isolation, and critical care facilities
- Training health care workers at NRH, Honiara City Council and the provinces in surveillance, clinical management, infection prevention, and control.
- Distributing information and education materials to improve community awareness and to encourage good hygiene practices.

12. If the symptoms of the virus are mild for most people, why is the Government making so much effort to keep COVID-19 out?

For most people COVID-19 is a mild disease, but it can be serious for some people and even fatal. Because people do not have immunity to this new virus, and therefore, a large number of people are likely to be infected. In addition, there will be a significant effect on the economy of the country. Even a small number of cases will impact on our health system and cause major disruption to businesses and services. We are working closely within the health sector, across government and with our development partners – WHO, DFAT and UNICEF - to keep the virus out and, if it does enter the country, we are responding quickly.

13. Can people catch the virus from animals?

This is no risk of catching the virus from animals in the Solomon Islands. Sensible food safety precautions should be always be taken when handling raw meat, milk or animal organs to avoid contamination of uncooked foods and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.

14. I have been planning to travel to one of the countries on the Government’s list of “affected” countries – can I still go?

As of February 27, 2020, the Government is recommending Solomon Islands citizens and residents defer all non-essential travel to any of these “affected” countries: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Cambodia, Canada, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Philippines, Russia, Sri Lanka, Spain, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vietnam. All travellers originating or

transiting through these countries will be monitored and are **mandated** to report the development of any symptoms within 14 days of arrival in Solomon Islands.

It is also important to note that anyone who has travelled from or transited through “Restricted Countries” 14 days before their arrival in Solomon Islands **will not be permitted to enter**. The countries are: Peoples Republic of China (Mainland China), Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Italy, Hong Kong SAR, Thailand, Iran, Chinese Taipei and Macau.

15. What is quarantine, what is isolation, and why are they necessary?

As part of the MHMS’s preparedness to respond to potential imported cases of COVID-19, we are establishing quarantine and isolation facilities in Honiara. Isolation and quarantine are standard public health measures taken to protect the public by stopping or limiting the spread of a contagious disease, like COVID-19.

- **Isolation** separates sick people with the disease from people who do not have the same disease.
- **Quarantine** separates people who do not have any symptoms but may have been exposed to the virus. These people are monitored to see if they become sick.

An isolation centre is used to separate sick individuals from other, uninfected people. At the isolation centre, generally a dedicated ward at a hospital, the patient will be isolated from other patients, and will be provided appropriate medical care. Health care workers will be provided appropriate protective equipment to help protect them from the virus, whilst providing care to the patient.

Individuals who do not have any symptoms, may be quarantined if there is the risk they may have been exposed to the virus and may become sick. For example, if a person travelled on the same plane as a sick person. Quarantining is a precautionary measure that helps reduce the risk of a contagious disease spreading. If a person is quarantined, they will be restricted within the facility and monitored closely for 14 days to see if they become sick. If after 14 days they don’t become sick, then they will be cleared and allowed to re-enter the general community.

People may be sent to a facility for quarantine, or they may be asked to stay at home or in their hotel room for 14 days. People quarantined at their place of residence should remain there and should NOT go to work, school or university, church, or other places of worship. They should also stay away from social activities, sports, shops and markets until the quarantine has been lifted.

16. What is the risk to communities living nearby quarantine facilities?

Quarantine aims to protect the community. People in quarantine are not permitted to move outside the facility, and those caring for people in quarantine wear protective clothing. There is no evidence to suggest that surrounding communities could be exposed to the virus. The virus spreads primarily when a person is in close contact with a sick person (within 1-2 metres), for example living in the same household or workplace.

16. Where can I find more information about COVID-19?

You may be feeling confused, anxious or scared about the possibility of COVID-19 coming to the Solomon Islands. This is understandable, as the disease is so new and there is much we do not know. But it is important that we avoid sharing information that is inaccurate and stick to what is KNOWN. Seek Information from any nearest Health Promotion Office, or Call the Public Health Emergency Surveillance unit on **23650 or 7522202**.

Solomon Islands is a Member State of the World Health Organization (WHO). You can find more information about the virus and actions to prevent its spread here: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
