

COVID-19 – A Guide for People Living with Lung Disease and Lung Cancer

People living with a lung disease and lung cancer are at higher risk of severe cases of viruses such as influenza and pneumococcal and this applies to the current COVID-19 outbreak. You may be feeling anxious and concerned about how to best minimise your risk of contracting the virus. The following advice is specific for people living with a lung disease or lung cancer.

What is coronavirus and COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that affect the lungs and airways and can make people sick. Some coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold and others can cause more serious diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

This new coronavirus disease outbreak is called COVID-19.

How does it spread?

COVID-19 likely spreads from person-to-person through:

- Direct close contact with an infected person while they are contagious
- Close contact with an infected person who coughs or sneezes
- Touching objects or surfaces that have been contaminated by someone with the coronavirus infection, then touching your mouth or face.

Who is at risk?

Like other viruses, such as influenza, most people who are infected with COVID-19 may not get sick at all or will experience mild symptoms and recover easily. For a small amount of people, COVID-19 can make them very ill, very quickly. From previous experience with coronaviruses, the people most at risk of serious infection are:

- People with compromised immune systems, such as people with cancer
- People with diagnosed chronic medical conditions
- Elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Very young children and babies.

Considerations for people living with a lung condition

While we don't yet completely understand the impact of COVID-19 on people living with a pre-existing lung condition, we do know that other viruses, such as influenza can be particularly harmful to this community.

If you are living with a lung condition, it is important to not only practice good hygiene as the best defence against the virus, but you may also want to consider additional steps to minimise your risk of exposure.

How to help prevent infection?

Good hygiene practices, recommended by the Australian Medical Association and Department of Health include:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially before and after eating and going to the toilet. If soap and water are not available, use a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or a flexed elbow when you cough and sneeze
- If unwell, avoid contact with others (touching, kissing, hugging, and other intimate contact) and stay more than 1.5 metres away from others to reduce the spread of virus particles
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

Social distancing

Avoiding close physical contact with other people is known as social distancing. This means keeping a minimum distance of 1.5 metres between you and other people whenever possible. Unfortunately, with COVID-19 people may have the virus, but not be showing symptoms so minimising physical contact all together may help to reduce your risk of exposure.

Socialising

Steps are being taken by the government to limit non-essential organised gatherings. During this time, we encourage you to consider avoiding large gatherings of people where possible; this includes busy shopping centres, community events and activities.

Family members are often an integral support to people living with a lung condition and may help with daily tasks of living. If any family members suspect they may be unwell, consider taking precautionary steps where possible to avoid contact.

Young children can spread a range of respiratory infections and display only mild symptoms. As we face an early influenza season and potentially increasing spread of COVID-19, consider whether having children visit you is suitable at this time.

Connecting with your treating healthcare team

Take the time to speak to your treating healthcare team about reasonable precautions you can take to minimise your risk of exposure to COVID-19, as they are best-placed to provide advice suitable to you and your condition.

To enable you to effectively manage your overall health and to minimise your risk of exposure, the Department of Health has announced bulk-billed telephone consultation services which can be

provided by your GP. This is available for people who are considered vulnerable to risk of serious infection.

This service is available for people who are:

- At least 70 years old
- At least 50 years old and of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- Pregnant
- A parent of a child under 12 months
- Already under treatment for chronic health conditions or are immune compromised
- A person diagnosed with COVID-19 virus but who is not a patient of a hospital
- A person required to isolate themselves in quarantine in accordance with home isolation guidance issued by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

Contact your GP for more information.

Action plan

Action plans help you understand your day-to-day lung disease symptoms and current medications, how to recognise when your symptoms change or worsen and what action you need to take. Ensure you have an action plan developed with your treating doctor and it is up-to-date.

To effectively follow the instructions on your action plan, ensure you have the necessary prescriptions from your doctor and an adequate supply of in-date medication.

Vaccination

It is important that your vaccinations are up-to-date, particularly as we approach flu season. Organise with your treating healthcare team to have your influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations updated as they become available.

Facemask

You don't need to wear a mask if you are healthy. While the use of surgical masks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like COVID-19. In fact, wearing a facemask can make breathing more difficult for people living with a lung disease. Please seek advice from your treating healthcare team before using a mask as a preventative measure.

Travel and transport

Consider avoiding all non-essential domestic and international travel in the coming months.

Overseas travel is becoming more complex, with governments introducing entry restrictions. The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Travel recommend at risk people consult with their doctor before considering travel.

Public transport brings people together in close proximity, leading to greater potential for the virus to spread. If you need to catch public transport, the best advice is to practise good hygiene.

When to seek medical attention?

If you're experiencing any cold or flu-like symptoms, self-isolate and seek medical attention as early as possible. You should telephone your health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your travel history or if you may have been in contact with a potential case of COVID-19.

If you want to talk to someone about your symptoms first, call the Coronavirus Health Information Line for advice on [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080).

COVID-19 symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath

If you experience any cold or flu-like symptoms, you must remain isolated either in your home or a healthcare setting until public health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Lung Foundation Australia programs

Lung Foundation Australia has enacted its' own organisational plan to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for our consumers and stakeholders. As part of this plan, we have cancelled the following programs until further notice:

- Activities and meetings involving face-to-face contact specifically between patients (or groups of vulnerable people), clinicians and researchers
- Lungs in Action classes
- Face-to-face Peer Support Groups.

Our Information and Support Centre remains open during its regular operating hours. We're working hard to digitalise other support services and programs to ensure you have access to the support and care you need during this time.

Useful telephone numbers

- **Coronavirus Health Information Line:** [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080). Call this line if you are seeking information on COVID-19. The line operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Healthdirect Helpline:** [1800 022 222](tel:1800022222). Call this line if you are not sure what to do – whether you should see a local GP, manage the condition at home, or go to an emergency department. The line is staffed by registered nurses and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **13HEALTH (QLD residents only):** [13 43 25 84](tel:13432584). Call this line for health information and assessment of symptoms. The line is staffed by registered nurses and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our **Information and Support Centre** is still available from Monday to Friday 8.00 am to 4.30 pm (AEST). You can contact our staff on [1800 654 301](tel:1800654301) and press 3 for the telephone service. If we are already on the telephone, please leave a message and our staff will return your call as soon as possible.