

20 March 2020

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Re: COVID-19 Update

COVID-19 has continued to be reported in a growing number of cases around the world.

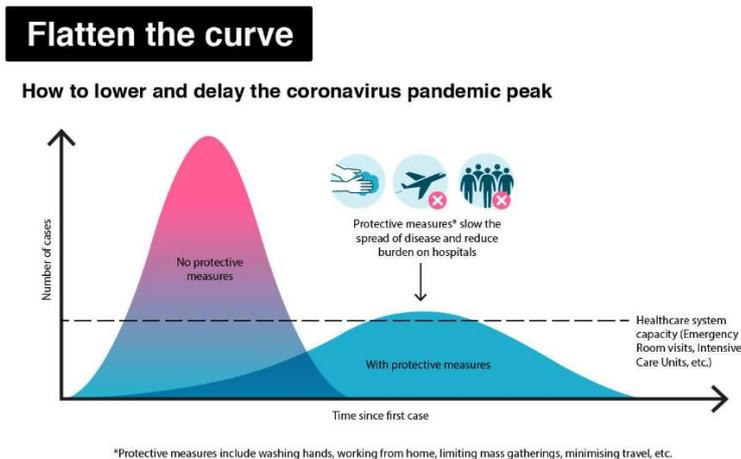
The WHO Situation Report 59 (as at 00:00 CET 19 March 2020), has 168 countries/territories (including China) with confirmed cases. Total reported cases outside of China now sits at 128,665 with a total including China of 209,839 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Case fatality rate remains at approximately 4.2% (based on Situation report 59 figures), with total global reported deaths since December 2019 now sitting at 8,778.

As at 06:30 20th of March, Australia has 709 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with six fatalities recorded. Of these cases:

Australian Capital Territory	4
New South Wales	307
Northern Territory	0
Queensland	144
South Australia	42
Tasmania	10
Victoria	150
Western Australia	52

The government has continued to implement a range of new measures which are aimed at flattening the curve – *slow the spread and free up the bed.*

Flattening the curve refers to the speed at which the spread of disease occurs. By flattening the curve in terms of numbers of cases occurring in a short period of time it reduces the impact on health services for those requiring critical care. It is important to note that the idea of flattening the curve does not mean that overall numbers may be reduced, just that the surge affecting health care services is reduced.



Please find to follow information regarding ongoing workplace planning. This advice is based on the most up-to-date recommendations from a number of sources including WHO, Australian Government Department of Health, Queensland Health and the Royal Australian College of Practitioners.

Workplace Preparation

Ongoing workplace preparation and review of developing procedures is recommended in line with the previous advice. It should be noted that the Australian Government has enacted Phase Two of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Phase Two allows for the cancellation (if required) of certain activities such as suspension of schools/universities, cancellation of mass gatherings such as sporting events, and any other general restrictions that the government feels will assist in impeding the spread of the virus.

As of the 19th of March, as a part of social distancing measures non-essential gatherings of 500 or more people outdoors and 100 people indoors should not be occurring. This does not extend to workplaces, universities, schools, shops, supermarkets, airports or public transport at this stage. This has seen a number of festivals, sports competitions and concerts cancelled. This is likely to continue for the next 3-6 months.

The government has also made recommendations in relation to other social distancing, these include:

- Stop shaking hands
- Maintain a social distance of 1.5metres (particularly with those that maybe unwell)
- Avoid queuing, handholding and assemblies
- Clean and disinfect shared high-touch surfaces regularly
- Hold essential meetings outside in the open air if possible
- Take lunch outside rather than in the lunch room

Personnel should also be encouraged to:

- Clean their hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs
- Minimise touching of shared surfaces, particularly in public places
- If you need to – sneeze or cough into your elbow or a clean tissue (and dispose of the tissue in the bin immediately)
- Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth
- Use where possible electronic communication tools for undertaking meetings
- Supporting employees where available and appropriate to work from home
- Stay home if you are unwell

-  When you have visitors to your home, exchange "1 metre greetings", like a wave, nod, or bow.
-  Ask visitors and those you live with to wash their hands.
-  Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces in your home, especially areas that people touch a lot.
-  If someone you live with isn't feeling well (especially with possible COVID-19 symptoms), limit your shared spaces.
-  If you become ill with symptoms of COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider by telephone before visiting your healthcare facility.
-  Make a plan in preparation for an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community.
-  When you go out in public, follow the same preventative guidelines as you would at home.
-  Stay up to date using information from reliable sources.

We have developed the accompanying triage flowchart to assess any staff who may be of concern. Please note that this is based on the current advice as available from the Australian Government Department of Health and Queensland Health. This advice is subject to ongoing review and change and the flowchart will be updated as this advice changes. The flowchart has been updated to also capture the increasing amount of local transmission which is occurring.

Separating Fact from Fiction

The WHO have put a selection of mythbusters together to help dispel a number of concerns within the broader community. These can be found on the WHO website at the following link:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

International Travel

The Australian Government has again amended their travel advice. Until 9:00pm AEDT 20 March, foreign nationals who have recently arrived in Australia must self-isolate in a home or hotel for 14 days after entering Australia. From 9:00pm AEDT 20 March, only Australian citizens, residents and immediate family members can travel to Australia.

The above restrictions are in place until further notice.

The recommendation in regards to overseas travel to all locations by The Australian Government is “do not travel” to all overseas locations.

Airlines are required to refuse uplift for anyone identified as being unwell, and any passengers identified as unwell on the flight will be identified and referred for further assessment upon arrival at an international terminal.

There have also been recent announcements in regards to the grounding of all international flights by Qantas, Virgin and Jetstar Australia. As such the federal government has warned against overseas travel due to the potential to be stranded abroad.

Managing Staff

Staff should be encouraged to continue to maintain good hygiene practices at all times.

For any staff who may present to the workplace ill, current symptoms to watch out for include:

- Fever
- A cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Shortness of Breath

Please refer to the accompanying flowchart with regards to managing any staff within the workplace that may present with symptoms or who have recently travelled. Staff should be managed and reviewed against the criteria as outlined by Australian Government Department of Health. Where staff are referred out for further testing it **is important that they communicate prior to arrival what the situation is so as they can be managed appropriately on arrival.**

Those most at risk of serious infection are:

- People with compromised immune systems (*eg. Cancer patients*)
- Elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with a diagnosed chronic medical condition
- Very young children and babies (*please note at this stage the risk to children and babies and the role they may play in transmission is not clear*)

- People in group residential settings
- People in detention facilities

Consideration should be given to having a designated room within the workplace for personnel to be placed whilst being assessed that is enclosed and has minimum surfaces that would require cleaning after use. We have assembled some quarantine packs and have these available if needed for managing anyone that may require isolation and/or testing.

As the situation is changing on a continual basis at the moment it is important to review all travel advice from the Australian Government and maintain awareness of any changes in advice from both the federal and state health departments.

I trust the forgoing is of assistance. If you require any further information in regards to this issue, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Burke', with a horizontal line underneath.

Nicholas Burke
Occupational Physician

Previously provided links to resource documents.

WHO published the following advice piece in relation to “Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19”

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_4

Australian Government advice for employers.

https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/02/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-employers_1.pdf

Workplace information posters

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/blue-4.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/blue-1.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/blue-3.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/blue-2.png>

The WHO have also published a series of information posters to provide advice on staying healthy whilst travelling for those that can't avoid it.

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/1.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/2.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/3.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/4.png>

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/social-media-squares/5.png>