

COVID-19: Social Distancing for the Community Factsheet

23 April 2020

Social distancing describes activities everyone in the community can do to help slow the spread of COVID-19. By having less face to face contact with people, even when you are well, you can slow the spread of COVID-19 in yourself, your family, and your community.

Some groups have been advised by public health that they must self-isolate or home-isolate. This is different from social distancing. You must self-isolate if you have COVID-19 or are being tested for it, you must home-isolate until you test negative or recover. If you have travelled overseas or been in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, you have to home-isolate for 14 days from when you returned or when you last had contact with that person. More information on **home-isolation** is available in the AH&MRC Home-Isolation Factsheets and on the NSW Health [website](#).

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is a new coronavirus first seen in China. It has now spread globally.
- COVID-19 causes symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat, and difficulty breathing.
- COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person contact, or from the droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes and through contaminated hands, objects, and surfaces.
- There is currently no vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, so preventing its spread is the best way to help protect the community.
- For more information call the free National Coronavirus Information 24/7 helpline on 1800 020 080.

What does social distancing mean? Why is this important?

- Social distancing means having less close contact with other people, including your friends, family, and community. This means there are less chances for us to catch or spread COVID-19.
- Social distancing can help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community. This helps to protect community members who are at higher risk of becoming seriously sick from COVID-19. This also helps to take the pressure off health services, because there are fewer people sick at the same time. This is called "*flattening the epidemic curve*."
- To help with social distancing, the NSW Government in April 2020 has limited all gatherings in a public place to two people. There are some exceptions including gatherings for work, people who live in the same household or people who are travelling in cars.

Social distancing rules change often. It is important to stay up to date with the latest information. As of April 2020 we must:

- Stay home as much as possible except to go to work, school, doctors, exercise, get groceries, and use public transport.

What can we do to help practice social distancing?

- Avoid large crowds and big groups of people.
- Try to keep a safe distance of 2 metres (2 big steps) between yourself and other people.
- As many family gatherings and community events have been cancelled, consider having a yarn over the phone with your family and friends instead.
- Small gatherings in enclosed spaces promote the spread of COVID-19 in public places that remain open, including supermarkets and stores, there must be at least 4 square-metres of space for each person. Try to spend less than 15 minutes during face-to-face connections. Longer interactions mean more chance our Elders and family can get sick.
- Avoid shaking hands, hugging, or kissing other people. You can wave to say hello.
- Avoid visiting people at higher risk of becoming seriously sick with COVID-19. This includes Elders and people living with health problems, like heart, lung or kidney problems, diabetes, or cancer.

Can you still see a doctor while social distancing?

Yes, you can still arrange to see your doctor!

- If you have flu-like symptoms you should call ahead before visiting your AMS or local doctor. Calling ahead helps them prepare to give you the best care.
- You may notice changes at your local health service, like chairs in the waiting area being placed further apart, or appointments may be on the phone with your doctor instead of face to face. These changes are to keep everyone safe and help slow the spread of COVID-19.
- Please be patient with health services. They are under pressure because of the COVID-19 pandemic but still committed to give you the best care they can.

What can you do to help protect your family and your community?

- Wash your hands properly with soap and water or hand sanitizer for at least 20 seconds. Wash your hands often throughout the day.
- Cover your cough and sneezes with a tissue. Dispose the tissue straight away and wash your hands. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Being away from your family and community can be hard, so having someone to have a yarn with over the phone or video calling is important for your wellbeing. Make sure you reach out to your mob to check in and see how they are going as well.
- If you or the kids are feeling sick with cold or flu-like symptoms stay home and call your local AMS, before you visit.
- Talk to your work about whether working from home might be possible for you.
- If you have a visitor, try to meet on the verandah or outside and keep a safe distance from each other.

- If you are fit and well, you can support Elders and people living with health conditions by offering to pick up groceries, medications, and other essentials. This way they can remain at home and you can drop these items off for them at their door.

What are the changes the NSW Government has introduced?

- The NSW Government announced a shutdown of non-essential services effective from midday Monday 23 March 2020. Health services, supermarkets, schools, petrol stations, pharmacies and banks remain open. Restaurants and cafes are only permitted to serve takeaways.
- The NSW Government has forced the cancellation of all indoor and outdoor events with more than 2 people. There are some exceptions, including weddings (limited to 5 people only) and funerals (limited to 10 people).
- The NSW and Federal Governments are introducing new rules to enforce social distancing, so there may be regular updates and changes.

Visit the [Australian Health Department](#) or [NSW Government](#) websites for the latest information.