Frequently Asked Questions – COVID-19*

*COVID-19 was previously known as novel coronavirus

This document was updated on 08 April 2020 to align with latest Government advice:

- All people in Australia are advised to remain at home, where possible, for their own and others' safety. Staff and students are supported to work or study from home.

What is the University of Tasmania doing about COVID-19?

- Now that this disease is on our shores, our focus is on supporting our whole community through the hurdles this disease brings. We have a dedicated team across all aspects of the University operations who have undertaken considerable planning since the outbreak in China began.

- With most of our students and staff working from home under COVID-19 Government guidelines, the University is moving to consolidate and transition to a temporary closure of underutilised buildings. Our University remains open and our campuses, while consolidated, also remain open. We know there are staff and students who need to work on campus, for personal or professional reasons, and they can continue to do so safely. The Temporary Campus Building Closures guide online booklet gives a full list of temporary building closures, accessible spaces (such as computer labs and research facilities) and a safe working guide for those working on campus.

- We have made our inner-city Fountainside Apartments available for the Tasmanian Government’s COVID-19 response.

- We have made our nursing simulation and training facility in Launceston available for the COVID-19 response, if required.

- In line with Australian Government restrictions, all staff and students have been advised to work or study from home, where possible.

- We have closed all University libraries, study spaces and student service points until further notice.

- To protect the safety and wellbeing of our staff, students and the community, we will continue adapting the way we operate to ensure we are meeting Government guidelines.

- We have put in place:
  - Online teaching for as many courses as possible;
  - Working from home where possible. Safe places have been provided for staff who are not in the position to work from home;
✓ Cancellation of events where people gather, in line with national guidelines;
✓ Temporary closure of libraries, and faith, fitness and cultural facilities, in line with national guidelines;
✓ Cessation of international and domestic travel and guidance that only ‘essential’ interstate and intrastate travel will be considered.

- Since late January, we have:
  ✓ had a heightened cleaning regime of high traffic areas across all campuses;
  ✓ implemented additional steps to check in with all offshore students returning to campus to ensure they are well and are aware of what to do should they become unwell;
  ✓ promoted good hygiene practices, including hand sanitiser stations and posters across every campus.

- We have set up a dedicated helpline (+61 3 6226 2600) to provide support for students with immediate concerns or queries.

- We have set up a webpage with information for students, which is regularly updated.

What are the latest travel restrictions in relation to COVID-19?

**Australia**

- All people in Australia are advised to remain at home, where possible, for their own and others’ safety.
- Following activation of a level-four travel advisory, the Federal Government has since announced a ‘do not travel’ ban on Australians travelling overseas.
- Domestic travel is only permitted for the purposes of ‘essential’ services.
- All non-residents are restricted from arriving in Australia. Only Australian citizens, residents and immediate family members can travel to Australia. This restriction replaces earlier travel bans on foreigners coming from mainland China, Iran, Italy and South Korea.
- Australians who return from overseas must self-isolate for 14 days.
- The revised bans are reviewed by the Australian Government on a weekly basis. Updates are provided on the [Australian Government health alert webpage](https://www.gov.au).  

**Tasmania**

- All people in Tasmania are advised to remain at home, where possible, for their own and others’ safety.
- All 'non-essential' travellers into the State are required to be in a Government-run quarantine facility for 14 days. 'Essential' travellers include people required to keep the state's health system and trade operational.
- Travel to/from King Island and Flinders Island should not be undertaken unless it is 'essential'.

What are the latest social distancing guidelines?

- The Australian Government has announced that from midnight 30 March, indoor and outdoor gatherings are restricted to a maximum of two people with the exception of people living in the same home, family units, weddings and funerals.

- People in Australia are required to stay home unless:
  - shopping for what you need – food and necessary supplies;
  - medical or health care needs, including compassionate requirements;
  - exercise in compliance with the public gathering requirements;
  - work and study if you can’t work or learn remotely.

- For their own protection, the following groups are advised to self-isolate at home and limit contact with others as much as possible when outside the home:
  - People over 70 years of age;
  - People over 60 years of age who have existing health conditions or comorbidities;
  - Indigenous Australians over the age of 50 who have existing health conditions or comorbidities.

- To reduce social contact, the Australian Government announced the following venues are prohibited from opening to the public:
  - Food courts (except for delivery and takeaway)
  - Auction houses, real estate auctions and open home inspections
  - Beauty salons, spas, massage and tattoo parlours
  - Concert venues, theatres, arenas, auditoriums and stadiums
  - Health, fitness and wellness centres
  - Libraries, community centres and youth centres
  - Pubs, registered and licenced clubs (excluding bottle shops attached to these venues), hotels (excluding accommodation)
  - Gyms and indoor sporting venues
  - Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, and night clubs

- The following activities are restricted:
  - Restaurants and cafes are restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery
  - Weddings restricted to 5 people (the couple, celebrant and a witness each)
  - Funerals restricted to a maximum of 10 people (States and Territories can provide exemptions)
  - Religious gatherings and places of worship (in enclosed spaces and other than very small groups and where the 1 person per 4 square metre rule applies).
  - View the full list
What does social distancing mean?

- Social distancing means physically staying at least 1.5 metres apart from another person and staying away from situations with other people, where possible. This Government factsheet provides further information.
- If you are sick, stay away from others – that is the most important thing you can do. You should also practise good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene.

What should I do if I’m feeling unwell?

- If you begin to feel unwell, with even with mild symptoms such as headache and slight runny nose, stay at home until you recover. Why? Avoiding contact with others when you’re unwell helps prevent the spread of possible COVID-19 and other viruses.
- Some people are more vulnerable to serious infection so by staying at home when you are unwell, helps protect those most vulnerable in our community.
- If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call a GP, health clinic or Public Health Hotline (Tas: 1800 671 738; NSW: 1800 022 222) in advance and tell them your condition. Why? Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also help to prevent possible spread of COVID-19 and other viruses.
- If you are not well and having trouble accessing medical attention, please contact us on +61 3 6226 2600.
- Out-of-hours care should be accessed at the Emergency Department of your local hospital.

What should I do if I see someone who appears unwell?

- Express to the person your concern that they don’t appear well and ask them how they are feeling. If they are feeling unwell, suggest they return home, until they recover. Why? Avoiding contact with others when you’re unwell helps prevent the spread of possible COVID-19 and other viruses.

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms of COVID-19 may include fever, cough, sore throat, nausea/vomiting and shortness of breath. Difficulty breathing is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention.
- It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show after a person has been infected.
- Those considered to be at high risk may have travelled from high risk countries recently; or have been in close contact with a confirmed case of the COVID-19.

What do ‘casual contact’ and ‘close contact’ mean?

**Casual contact**

- A casual contact is someone who has been in the same general area as someone who has tested positive for the coronavirus while infectious.
• Casual contacts do not need to be excluded from work or school while well. You must closely monitor your health and if you experience any symptoms you are advised to isolate yourself and contact your usual doctor, who will liaise with public health authorities to care for you. Public health authorities may need to contact you for contact tracing purposes. This factsheet provides further information.

Close contact

• You have been identified as having had close contact with someone diagnosed with Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

• Someone from your local public health unit will be in contact with you daily while you are at risk of infection to monitor you for symptoms. You must isolate yourself in your home for 14 days after last contact with the confirmed case. Read this factsheet

How can we help prevent the spread of virus and seasonal illness?

• Practising good hygiene is the best defence against most viruses and we encourage you to:
  ✓ Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze (with a flexed elbow or tissue, not your hand)
  ✓ Wash your hands often with soap and water
  ✓ Avoid being in an enclosed space with anyone who is unwell
  ✓ Maintain at least 1.5 metre distance between yourself and others, where at all possible

Where should I go for up-to-date information on COVID-19?

• The University is closely monitoring and following advice from these primary sources:
  ✓ Australian Government COVID-19 website
  ✓ Tasmanian Government COVID-19 website
  ✓ Australian Government Department of Health COVID-19 information
  ✓ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs
  ✓ World Health Organization

How are the University’s teaching activities affected?

• We are delivering our teaching online where possible and staff are supported to work from home or at a location that enables adequate physical distancing.

We understand that some members of the University community may be experiencing anxiety or concern. We have dedicated counselling services in place for staff and students:

• Students who are concerned should make an appointment to talk to a counsellor online or by phone as part of our free and confidential Counselling Services.

• Staff members can access free and confidential free and confidential counselling services through the University’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) by phoning 1800 650 204 or booking online at www.newportwildman.com.au

• The Australian Psychological Society has produced a help sheet with advice on coping with coronavirus anxiety.
How long will the travel restrictions be in place?

- It is estimated that the COVID-19 response will last until September 2020, but this could change. The travel restrictions are reviewed weekly by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs.

- Specific questions should be directed to the airline.

- The University is closely monitoring the progress of the COVID-19 outbreak and is providing updates to staff and students via email.

**Students**

Answers to most frequently asked questions and helpline contacts for students can be found on the Support for our students during COVID-19 webpage

Information for postgraduate students is available under Frequently Asked Questions, under the ‘Research Support’ tab, on the Support for our students during COVID-19 webpage.

**Staff**

**How is the University advising front-line staff?**

- Since this situation emerged, we have been in daily contact with state and national health authorities to ensure we have the latest advice so that we can reduce risk to you and our community.

- Following advice from the Australian Government, all staff are advised to work from home, wherever possible. Appropriate workspaces will be provided to staff who are not in the position to work from home – please discuss this with your manager.

- The University is well prepared and can scale up our response if it is needed.

- We are advising staff to:
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water and/or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze (with a flexed elbow or tissue, not your hand)
  - Avoid being in an enclosed space with anyone who is unwell
  - Maintain at least 1.5 metre distance between yourself and others, where at all possible
  - Don’t leave home if you feel unwell, unless to seek medical assistance.
  - Practise safe food handling, wash hands before and after handling food and ensure food is cooked thoroughly

- If staff members feel stressed or anxious about the situation, please discuss your personal health circumstances with a medical health professional, and if required, discuss with your Supervisor.
• The University’s Employee Assistance Program (Newport & Wildman) is available 24/7 for any staff member. If you need support at any time, please call 1800 650 204.

• The Australian Psychological Society has produced a help sheet with advice on coping with coronavirus anxiety.

• Staff requiring help with queries related to study plans, deferral, leave of absence, extensions, refunds or other administrative matters related to student studies should email China.EnrolmentAdviceDesk@utas.edu.au

If a staff member contracts COVID-19, what is the return to work procedure?

• If you have a positive result, you will need to stay in home isolation, unless you need medical care. Public Health Services will contact you with more information and when it is safe for you to return to the routine as advised by Government.

• As always, keep your line manager updated on your anticipated return to your work duties. Staff are advised to work from home, where possible.

Should I be wearing a face mask if I am dealing with people face-to-face?

• Some confusion exists around the efficacy of masks. Face masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like COVID-19. While in some cultures it is common to wear them as a courtesy to others, their adoption on campus is not necessary in this instance.

• The World Health Organization has a good website with some videos and instructions on when and how to wear a mask.

What is the University’s travel advice to staff?

• The University has placed a pause on international travel. Critical domestic and intrastate travel will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must be approved.

Can I still travel overseas for work?

• No, the Australian Government has placed restrictions on all international travel, and you are required to work from home, where at all possible.

• We are monitoring the situation closely. Please refer to Smart Traveller for updates on all travel restrictions.

How will COVID-19 affect research collaborations with China and other countries subject to travel restrictions?

• Research should continue to be carried out unless directly advised otherwise.

• Online and phone communication with international collaborators can be carried out as usual.

What should I do if I have an airline booking to China or other countries subject to travel restrictions this semester?

• Please refer to the airline’s website for instructions.
• General updates about travel restrictions are provided by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs

What should I do if I see someone who appears unwell?

• Express to the person your concern that they don’t appear well and ask them how they are feeling. If they are feeling unwell, suggest they return home, until they recover. Why? Avoiding contact with others when you are unwell helps prevent the spread of possible COVID-19 and other viruses.
• People Leaders should proactively support their teams to work from home and if this is not possible, to provide a safe location for that staff member to work.

How are the University’s teaching activities affected?

• We are delivering our teaching online where possible and staff are supported to work from home wherever possible. If this is not possible, staff are supported to work in a location that enables adequate physical distancing and safety.