Frequently Asked Questions – COVID-19*

*COVID-19 was previously known as novel coronavirus

This document was updated on 23 March 2020.

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.

• We have closed the Darlinghurst Campus in Sydney. Public Health advice is that all other campuses are safe to be continued to be used with heightened cleaning regimes, social distancing and adopting those practices which are known to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

• We have been in ongoing discussions with the State Government and Public Health about how we can help the response to COVID-19. We are working closely with our residents of the inner-city Fountainside Apartments to make it available for the Tasmanian Government as of 24 March.

• We have put in place:
  ✓ Online teaching for as many courses as possible;
  ✓ Split-teams model of staffing, with parts of our teams working from home on a two-week rotation;
  ✓ Cancellation of events where people gather, in line with national guidelines;
  ✓ Cessation of international travel and guidance that interstate travel should be undertaken only if strictly necessary.

• 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**

- Following a [level-four travel advisory](#), Australians are advised not to travel overseas.
- Domestic travel is only permitted for the purposes of 'essential' services.
- All non-residents are restricted from arriving in Australia from 9pm AEDT on Friday 20 March. This restriction replaces earlier travel bans on foreigners coming from mainland China, Iran, Italy and South Korea.
- Australians who return from overseas need to isolate themselves 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](#).

**Tasmania**

- From midnight on Friday 20 March, all 'non-essential' travellers into the state are required to self-quarantine for 14 days at a stated residence. 'Essential' travellers include people required to keep the state's health system and trade operational.
- Travel restrictions do not apply to Tasmanian residents on our islands, such as King and Flinders, flying into mainland Tasmania. However, they do apply to anyone travelling inbound to the island from mainland Australia including residents returning home to the island. Mainland Australians flying into our islands then onto mainland Tasmania need to self-quarantine when they arrive.

What are the latest social distancing guidelines?

- The Australian Government [announced](#) that the following facilities will be restricted from opening from midday, local time 23 March:
  - 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
  - Restaurants and cafes will be restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery
  - Religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals (in enclosed spaces and other than very small groups and where the 1 person per 4 square metre rule applies).
- These measures are expected to be in place for at least 6 months.
- For gatherings of fewer than 100 people in an enclosed space, the Government [recommends](#) four square metres per person.
- The Government [advises](#) against non-essential indoor gatherings of 100+ people and outdoor gatherings of 500+.
- This [Government factsheet](#) explains the definition and purpose of social distancing.
- 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 does social distancing mean?

- Social distancing includes ways to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. It means less contact between you and other people. [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 close contact with anyone who has a fever and cough
  ✓ Maintain at least 1.5 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is unwell

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 Department of Health COVID-19 information
  ✓ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs
  ✓ World Health Organisation

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 social distancing.
• Class sizes are smaller due to some students’ inability to travel into Australia.

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 expected that the COVID-19 response will last approximately 6 more months. 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

What solutions is the University offering for me to do my study online?

- We are offering online course delivery as much as possible in order to minimise any disruption to your study.
- A 24/7 learning support service has been made available to students and you can connect with this through each of your MyLO subject units.
- Information is available at Student COVID-19 Updates, which is updated daily.

Where should I go for help if I have any immediate concerns or queries?

- If you have any questions about your study, accommodation or concerns about wellbeing, please contact UConnect or call +61 3 6226 2600.
- Regularly updated information for students is available at Student COVID-19 Updates.

What if I am feeling fearful or anxious?

- Over the past couple of decades, we have experienced several diseases that have received global attention, including SARS, swine flu, equine flu, Influenza A and now the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Although these outbreaks have become part of life, it is common to feel fear and confusion as we try to make sense of a situation that doesn’t feel or appear normal.
- This can naturally cause anxiety, particularly when we have vulnerable family members. We are also extremely mindful of this, when we make decisions and plans in response to the virus. Our priority is the wellbeing of all members of the University Community, including their extended family and friends and visitors, but particularly the most vulnerable.
- The Australian Psychological Society has produced a help sheet with advice on coping with coronavirus anxiety. Some helpful tips include:
  ✓ Learn the facts
  ✓ Keep things in perspective
  ✓ Take reasonable precautions
  ✓ Practise self-care
- Students who are concerned should make an appointment to talk to a counsellor online or on the phone as part of our free and confidential Counselling Services.

What should I do if I can’t get into a doctor when I feel unwell?

- If you are having any difficulties seeking medical advice and need support, please contact UConnect or call +61 3 6226 2600.
- Out-of-hours care should be accessed at the Emergency Department of your local hospital.
If a student contracts COVID-19, when can they return to their normal routine?

- The Department of Health requires a patient to return two confirmed negative tests 24 hours apart before they can leave isolation and return to their normal routine.

What measures are in place to protect other students in University accommodation?

- All students who are in our accommodation and are required to self-isolate, are being provided with self-contained apartments to support their 14-day self-isolation period.
- We are ensuring our students who are not in University accommodation have suitable places for self-isolation, or, if not, we will provide it for them.

What support is available to me if I need to self-isolate, but I do not have the financial means to support this?

- All students in University accommodation will be provided with self-contained apartments to support their 14-day self-isolation period.
- If you are living in private accommodation, we ask that you follow the advice about self-isolation. If you are unable to follow that advice, please contact us on +61 03 6226 2600 and we will make arrangements to help you do so.

I am a postgraduate student currently in China. Can I continue with my research from a distance?

- Research should continue where possible. Discuss with your supervisor and/or Graduate Research Co-ordinator, continue your research if you can, and we will manage on a case-by-case basis if this is not possible.

What do I do about my Visa?

- If you are unable to return to Australia due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions please contact us on +61 03 6226 2600 or email UConnect to discuss online study options.
- The Department of Home Affairs website has some useful information for students with concerns about visa expiry dates or visa applications for study in Australia.
Staff

How is the University advising front-line staff?

- We assure you that we are closely monitoring the situation and are working to keep everyone safe while minimising disruption.

- 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.

- We have begun the transition to full online delivery and staffing, on the basis of our model of split teams and working from home.

- 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 contact with anyone who has a fever or cough
  ✓ Maintain at least 1.5 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is unwell
  ✓ Don’t go to work or attend campus if you feel unwell
  ✓ Practice 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?

- The Department of Health requires a patient to return two confirmed negative tests 24 hours apart before they can leave isolation and return to work.

- As always, staff should keep their line manager updated on their anticipated return to work.
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 Organisation 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 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. We will continue to monitor how the situation unfolds.

- 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’re unwell helps prevent the spread of possible COVID-19 and other viruses.

- People Leaders should proactively promote with their teams to stay home if unwell to prevent spreading illness at work.

- If the staff member feels well enough to work, but still has symptoms, then another option maybe for that staff member to work from home if agreed by their Manager.

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 social distancing.

- Class sizes are smaller due to Chinese students' inability to travel into Australia.