

Should We Be Alarmed About Coronavirus?

The Australian Government has activated its emergency response plan for global pandemics. Should we be getting alarmed about the coronavirus?

What Does the Activation of the Emergency Response Plan Mean?

- The emergency response plan has been activated to prepared for a potential outbreak of coronavirus and includes releasing protective equipment like masks to health care practitioners, increasing hospitals' capacity to respond to more patients and ensuring things like medication and vaccinations are readily available.
- If there actually is an outbreak, more actions may be implemented such as closing schools, cancelling large gatherings, quarantining people and even closing down public transport.

What Does the Activation of Emergency Response Plan Mean for Ordinary People?

- At this stage, not a great deal. You need to be aware that the coronavirus is spreading and consider what preparations you may need to make if an outbreak occurs.
- For example, consider this scenario: someone at a function you attend is diagnosed with coronavirus and everyone who was there is asked to quarantine themselves at home for a fortnight, starting immediately. What would you need? Consider food, pet food, medication. You may like to stock up on some of these things – such as buying just a little extra canned or non-perishable food when you shop but there's no need to hoard food!
- You may also like to consider the possibility that supply of some things may be interrupted. For example, if you can only use some products due to allergies, you may want to buy a little extra in case they become hard to get.

Do We Know how is Coronavirus Spread?

- Coronavirus is spread from person to person by infected droplets. If these droplets just remain on your skin you won't get sick – they must get into your body. There are three common ways this can occur:
 - an infected person coughs or sneezes close to you and you breathe in the droplets.
 - an infected person covers their mouth or nose while coughing or sneezing then touches you (e.g shakes hands) and you touch your face (e.g nose or mouth).
 - you touch a surface that an infected person coughs or sneezes on and touch your mouth.
- Coronavirus can also enter the body through the eyes as the blood vessels in the eyes are close to the surface. This can happen if someone coughs/sneezes close to you or you touch your eyes.

How Can We Avoid Getting Coronavirus?

- There is still no vaccine for coronavirus although it is being worked on.
- The most important prevention remains: wash your hands – after you cough or sneeze, after being on public transport or in a public place (including the supermarket), before preparing food or eating, after you go to the toilet and if you care for someone unwell. If you don't have ready access to soap and water, use an alcohol antibacterial hand wash.
- Stay at least one meter away from people who have flu like symptoms - if someone in a lift is coughing or sneezing, don't get in! Don't touch other people – including shaking hands.
- Regularly clean surfaces which are commonly touched by people such as door handles, taps, fridge door and benches. Use bacterial wipes to clean items commonly handled in public places such as the tables on planes or in food courts and the handles of shopping trolleys.
- Wipe down your mobile phone with an antiseptic wipe at least twice a day.
- Don't touch your face (i.e. mouth, nose or eyes) unless you have just washed your hands.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with people who are unwell or recovering (including shaking hands).

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