

Coronavirus: Information for Indigenous Communities

Last updated: Sunday, 5 April 2020

Latest announcements

- Childcare will be free to help essential workers to keep going to work during the coronavirus pandemic. Visit [Australia.gov.au](https://australia.gov.au)
- \$123 million boost to Indigenous response to COVID-19 - see media release [here](#).

Key messages: Keep our mob safe, stop the spread

- Together we can keep our mob safe and stop the spread.
- Coronavirus is a sickness that can spread from person to person.
- Coronavirus can affect everyone in our community. It can be dangerous, especially for our Elders or people who are already unwell.
 - Stay at home as much as possible, especially if you are over 50 years old or have a chronic illness.
 - Keep your distance, two big steps, from other people to protect our communities.
 - Where possible, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and keep your hands clean.
 - Cough or sneeze into your arm or elbow, not your hands.
 - Put your tissues in the bin after you use them and wash your hands after.
 - Avoid touching your face with dirty hands – especially your eyes, nose and mouth. This is where the virus can enter your body.
 - Clean surfaces regularly such as tables, kitchen benches, door handles, railings as well as commonly used items such as toys, phones, keys and wallets. Try and use antibacterial spray or disinfectant to remove the germs.
- Information is changing regularly. Stay up to date at **[Australia.gov.au](https://australia.gov.au)** or follow **#keepourmobsafe** on social media.

Information by topic

What is coronavirus

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a sickness that can spread from person to person. It can be dangerous, especially for our Elders, people who are already unwell or people with a chronic health condition.
- The sickness spreads from person to person when people cough or sneeze. Germs can stay on things people touch. Germs can spread fast.
- When a person who has the virus coughs or sneezes, tiny drops of the virus can spread. It can get into the eyes, nose or mouth of people around them, making them sick.
- It can also spread to things people who have the virus touch. Like a table, door handle or mobile phone. When other people touch those things, they can catch the virus.
- For some people, the virus will feel a lot like having a cold or flu. People who have the virus may have a high fever, a cough, a sore throat, and feel tired.
- Some people will get better without treatment. For other people the virus can be very dangerous. Especially for Elders and people in our community who have health problems, like bad heart, lungs, kidneys or diabetes.
- For some people the virus can get worse and become a sickness called pneumonia. It causes damage to the lungs and makes it hard to breathe. This can also stop people's organs working like they should.

Social distancing and restrictions on public gatherings

- Everyone should stay home where possible. This is especially important for anyone with a chronic illness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50.
- We need to encourage aunties, uncles and Elders to stay at home and not to see other people. Deliver food and supplies to their house so they don't have to go out.
- You should limit visitors to your home. Keep in contact over the phone or online. It's important to protect our communities.
- Only go out if you are shopping for food or essential items, receiving medical care, exercising or travelling to work or education.
- Only two people can be out at public places together. This is a new law and can be enforced by the police.

- You could receive a fine if you are in a public place in a group of more than two people. This new law does not apply to members of the same household.
- Visit [Australia.gov.au](https://www.australia.gov.au) for the latest advice and links to the rules for each state and territory.

Impacts on Ceremony and Sorry Business

- Culture and ceremony, such as large gatherings for Sorry Business, are very important to our communities. However, with restrictions on indoor and outdoor gatherings, we need to look at ways to do this differently to protect our communities from the spread of the virus.
- While restrictions are in place, we need to change how we go about Ceremony and Sorry Business, to avoid physical contact as much as possible and keep groups of people smaller. This will help protect our Elders and those who already have health problems.
- Talk to your Elders, family or land council about safe ways to undertake Sorry Business during these times.

Tips to stay healthy and strong

- Make sure you eat a range of healthy food, including fruit and veggies.
- Drink lots of water.
- Make sure to continue taking your normal medicines.
- Continue with your regular appointments if you have diabetes or a bad heart or lungs. You may be able to have your appointment with your doctor on the phone from home, instead of having to go to a clinic. Ask your clinic if they offer telehealth.
- Don't smoke, and don't share smokes with other people. Sharing smokes, food or drinks can spread germs and increase the spread of coronavirus in our community.
- If you need help to quit smoking call the Aboriginal Quitline on 13 78 48 or download the My QuitBuddy mobile app – it's free.
- Remember to get a flu shot – it is free for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over six months old. Call your doctor first and ask if they have the vaccine yet, and to make an appointment so you don't need to wait in the waiting area, especially if you are over 50. The flu shot won't protect you from getting coronavirus, but it can protect you from the flu.

Seek help if you feel unwell

- Call your Doctor, clinic or medical service if you feel unwell or have a fever, cough, or sore throat. They can tell you what to do.
- It's best to call them before you go in to see them. This will help to stop any germs you have from spreading to other people. You can ask someone you trust in the community to talk to the medical service about how you are feeling.
- The clinic or doctors might call you on the phone or video call to help you. It will help stop sick people spreading germs at the clinic. It is safe to talk to a doctor on the phone or video call.
- You can still see a Doctor or go to the clinic face to face in an emergency.
- While you are sick, stay at home, don't go to work or school or other places in the community where there are people. This way you won't pass the virus on to others.
- Try to stay in a separate room, and at least two big steps away from other people. If you feel sick – no kissing, hugging or other close contact.
- If you are feeling unwell, don't feel shame. You can...
 - Call your local medical service, health clinic or someone you trust in the community.
 - Call the 24 hour National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080.

Mental health

- Coronavirus is changing the way we live, work, communicate and connect with people. These changes can be hard for our communities.
- It's important to care of ourselves, our family, friends and community. Doing things for your mental health and wellbeing is more important now than ever.
- Check in on friends, family, Elders, Aunties and Uncles. Ask, are you OK?
- Help Elders, Aunties and Uncles to use technology, so they communicate online. Set up times to regularly connect.
- There are lots of things you can do to look after yourself, like eating well and keeping active. Going for walks can be a great way to connect to country. Just remember to at least two big steps away from other people.

- Being physically isolated doesn't mean you can't yarn. Call your friends and family on your phone, try making video calls, or have a yarn from the yard.
- Keep doing the things you enjoy. Things like art, dance or listening to music can also help you keep feeling good.
- [Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\)](#) has information about looking after yourself at this time. They are developing culturally appropriate mental health and wellbeing resources. They will be available on social media, NITV and podcasts.
- You can also talk to your local health clinic, Aboriginal Health Worker, or visit the following websites if you are concerned about your own or about someone else:
 - Head to Health (headtohealth.gov.au)
 - Beyond Blue (beyondblue.org.au)

Financial assistance

- The government is helping communities with funding where they need it. For information visit niaa.gov.au
- The Community Support Package will also help with bills, food, clothing or petrol. It will help keep people their jobs too.
- Extra services will be available through the National Debt Helpline too. You can call on **1800 007 007** if you are experience financial difficulties.

Remote community restrictions

- Travel restrictions for remote communities are now in place to help keep remote communities safe from coronavirus. People entering a remote community will need to self-isolate for 14 days first.
- Only people delivering an essential service or medical treatment will be allowed into communities without isolating. You should only leave your community if you need important medical treatment.
- If you do leave, you will need to self-isolate for 14 days before you can return. During self-isolation you need to stay inside and not see other people. Keep in touch with your friends and family by using the phone or internet.
- Staying in your own community, outstation or homeland is the best way to keep you and your community safe. You are less likely to catch the coronavirus. It will also help stop the spread between communities.

- If you travel to community without isolating, you will not be allowed to enter, and you could be fined. Visit niaa.gov.au or indigenous.gov.au for more information and maps of affected communities.

Where to go for more information

- Information is changing regularly.
 - Stay up to date at **Australia.gov.au**. All the information about coronavirus is linked from this website.
 - **24 Hour National Coronavirus Helpline 1800 020 080.**
 - Keep our mob safe website page: bit.ly/COVID19IndigenousHealth
 - Sign up for the eNewsletter: bit.ly/KeepourmobsafeSignUp
 - Download the official government 'Coronavirus Australia' app on your phone.
- The government is also sending text messages on mobile phones to help communicate about coronavirus. If you receive a message you are concerned about, call and talk to someone you trust in the community.