

How Do I Self-isolate: Overseas travellers returning before and after midnight, Sunday 15 March

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/18/australias-coronavirus-self-isolation-rules-who-has-to-do-it-and-how-it-works>

Australia's coronavirus self-isolation rules: who has to do it and how it works

With new requirements for everyone entering the country coming into force, here's what it actually means to self-isolate

From midnight on Sunday 15 March, everyone entering Australia from overseas, except for flight attendants and residents of the Pacific Islands, will be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon arrival. Failing to do so risks thousands in fines.

But what does self-isolation actually mean, and can you still Uber home from the airport? We answered your burning questions.

Can I get a taxi, Uber or public transport home from the airport?

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, indicated that people subject to self-isolation would still be able to take taxis and public transport from airports.

People who need to travel domestically after arriving in Australia will be able to continue their journey, beginning self-isolate when they arrive at their destination, according to Victoria's chief health officer, Brett Sutton.

It's important to maintain hygiene measures while in transit. Use hand sanitiser and cough into your elbow or into a tissue, and maintain a 1.5-metre distance from other passengers where possible. If you are a recently returned traveller in New South Wales, you must wear a surgical mask while travelling to your home or hotel.

The safest way to get home from the airport is for someone you live with to pick you up. If you have to take an Uber or a taxi, it's worth sitting in the back seat and keeping a note of the vehicle number or the driver.

Taxi and Uber drivers should be taking extra precautions too, said Chris Moy, the South Australian president of the Australian Medical Association. He recommends drivers use hand sanitiser and disinfectant.

I don't live alone. Does my family have to self-isolate as well? Can I share a bed with my partner?

This depends. If you have been diagnosed with Covid-19, anyone you live with will be classed as a close contact so all of you will need to self-isolate.

If you are only self-isolating as a precaution, for example because you have just returned from overseas, they do not need to self-isolate – but you should stay as far away from them as possible. Use a separate bedroom and bathroom if possible. Ensure everyone in the home washes their hands frequently, and surfaces and doorknobs are frequently wiped with an alcohol-based disinfectant. Try to stay at least 1.5 metres away from the other people in your home. You cannot have visitors.

Can I look after children, elderly parents or vulnerable people?

It's recommended you stay away from people who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, including elderly relatives, and minimise contact with other people, including children. If you are experiencing symptoms, wear a mask or a makeshift mask.

Moy said that people needing to look after children or parents while in self-isolation should maintain good hygiene practices and minimise contact. Try to keep a 1.5-metre distance when possible, wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, and disinfect surfaces.

"To expect hard and fast rules is difficult," he said. "We're asking for patience, commonsense and probably a level of ingenuity from the public to get us through this."

Can I go for a walk?

Each state and territory has slightly different laws around self-isolating, but if you are under a mandatory order to self-isolate it's best to avoid going outside for anything but medical appointments and emergencies. Wear a mask when outside.

The Australian government's health advice recommends exercise DVDs or walking around your backyard.

Peter Collignon, an infectious diseases expert from Australian National University, says the thing to keep in mind is your proximity to other people – which means a walk alone, at a quiet time of day, should be fine.

The situation may be different if you are under a legislative order, in which case you will have to abide by the rules set down in each state.

I have been self-isolating as a precaution and now I feel sick. What should I do?

If you are self-isolating because you have returned from overseas or have had contact with a known case, and you begin to notice respiratory symptoms (particularly fever, shortness of breath or a cough), contact your state or territory health department, your GP or the emergency clinic of your local hospital. Call before attending your GP or hospital to warn them you may have the virus.

If you have severe shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, call triple zero.

You will not be able to get a test unless you fit certain high-risk criteria and have respiratory symptoms. The Australian government is not testing asymptomatic people and at this stage testing remains restricted to people returning from overseas and known contacts of confirmed cases. If you have symptoms of pneumonia you will be tested regardless of travel or contact history.

What if I run out of food?

Ask a neighbour, family member or friend to deliver groceries to you. These should be left outside your door. The same goes for grocery deliveries and takeaway food.

The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, has said government care packages will be made available to people in that state. "In the event, through no fault of your own, you've found yourself at home without the basics, we will get those basics to you," he said.

Some community groups are also organising to provide food and supplies to people in isolation. If you have a neighbourhood Facebook group, check with them.

I returned from overseas last week. Do I have to self-isolate?

People who arrived in Australia before the mandatory 14-day self-isolation began at 12.01am on 16 March are not legally required to self-isolate, but they should still exercise caution.

The incubation period for Covid-19 is between five and 10 days. That means if you returned from overseas in the past two weeks, particularly from countries with a high rate of spread, such as the US, you should be engaging in social distancing, and monitoring yourself for any symptoms.

Collignon says the higher your risk of experiencing complications from the virus, the more distancing and hygiene measures you should be putting in place.

“For people in the high-risk group, particularly people over 70, once we get a lot of transmission in society, relative self-isolation is a good idea,” he said.

“You don’t become a hermit, but you limit your contact to people who are well, and to fewer people.”

The rate at which people should be increasing their isolation should rise with the spread of the disease, Collignon says. So while a healthy 50-year-old person may be social distancing now, once the weather cools in winter and the spread of the virus increases throughout the community, they may need to self-isolate.

What if I don’t self-isolate?

Self-isolation for 14 days is mandatory for anyone who arrived in Australia after 12.01am, 16 March and financial penalties apply.

More information

National coronavirus hotline – 1800 020 080

Victoria – 1800 675 398

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolation-faqs>

How do I self-isolate?

During isolation, you must stay at home or in your accommodation for 14 days. Don’t go to public places or places where you might have contact with other people, such as work, school, childcare, university or public gatherings.

Only people who usually live with you should be in the same home. Avoid seeing visitors. If you are in another form of accommodation, such as a hotel, avoid contact with other guests or staff.

When travelling home or to your accommodation to start isolation, use personal transport, such as a car, if you can. This will minimise your exposure to others.

If you have returned from overseas, but have no symptoms, then everyone else in your household should practice social distancing.

When in isolation, monitor yourself for symptoms including fever, cough or shortness of breath. Other early symptoms include chills, body aches, sore throat, runny nose and muscle pain.

If you become unwell, all other members of your household must self-isolate. Use the Symptom Checker, below, to find out what to do next (go to webpage).

