

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) and liver health conditions

Please note this information was prepared on 19 March 2020. It is not intended to replace medical advice.

We understand that there's a lot of information circulating about coronavirus (COVID-19) and you may be concerned.

Hepatitis Victoria/LiverWELL® is here to assist you make sense of the information and take the precautions recommended by trusted sources.

## What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

There are many types of coronaviruses that can affect both humans and animals. In humans, some are common and cause mild symptoms like the common cold, while others can be more severe.

A new coronavirus affecting humans was identified at the end of 2019 (named COVID-19). Reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe, including death. [You can obtain the latest situation summary from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services here.](#)

The COVID-19 virus is thought to be spread through:

- contact with an infected person (via respiratory droplets from a cough or sneeze)
- contact with infected surfaces or objects.

## COVID-19 symptoms

From the cases reported, the symptoms that have been observed may include:

- fever
- cough
- shortness of breath.

More information on symptoms is available from [Healthdirect](#).

## Can people be tested for the coronavirus?

Yes. Testing is available, however there is currently a shortage of test kits and the Victorian government has provided guidance on [who should be tested](#).

While there is currently no vaccine available to protect against the virus, work on producing one is underway.

## General recommendations: Healthy practices

There are preventive actions we should all take to protect ourselves and importantly prevent the spread of the disease.

Recommended ways to limit your risk of infection:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Do not touch your nose, eyes, and mouth if you have not washed your hands.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Perhaps sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or another short song two to three times to ensure you reach the full 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Check the label to confirm the amount of alcohol.

If you are feeling ill or you think you may have been exposed to COVID-19:

- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Contact your doctor. Do not attend a clinic without first telephoning ahead.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and then throw it in the bin.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects.
- Wear a facemask if you are showing symptoms or have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Wearing a mask will reduce the potential spread of the virus to others.

**If you suspect you have COVID-19 call the 24/7 Australian Government dedicated hotline on 1800 675 398**

### What if I am immunosuppressed or immunocompromised?

Some liver patients, such as people with cirrhosis and transplant patients, are generally at higher risk of infection from viruses such as colds or flus.

To lower your risk of catching or spreading germs, follow the Healthy practices listed above, call your doctor if you're feeling unwell and consider self-isolation.

Ensure you are up to date with your vaccinations and immunisation for Influenza and Pneumococcal disease that have been recommended by your health care practitioner.

These are funded for people aged 65 and over, and influenza vaccine is funded for all people with chronic liver disease.

Ensure you have enough medicines available to cover any period of self-isolation or in case there are disruptions to the medical supply chain.

Contact your health care professional as soon as possible if you think you've contracted the virus.

### Should I attend my routine clinic visits?

It is important that people with liver conditions remain under care during this time.

Hospitals and specialist clinics may look to reduce the number of people attending clinics for routine review.

New Medicare item numbers allow for Telehealth consultations by video conference. This may be an option to maintain your care without having to visit the clinic. Check with your specialist to see if this option is available and appropriate for you.

### Looking after yourself is key

Lifestyle factors are important when caring for your liver, either for prevention or maintenance of a liver condition.

These factors are particularly important when there are additional risks like there are at present, or if you are required to self-isolate, and are feeling distressed or uncertain.

Hepatitis Victoria/Liverwell® has developed four lifestyle guides to provide useful tips and advice about healthy living that provide guidance and suggestions for:

- [Eating well](#)
- [Getting active](#)
- [Feeling well](#)
- [Being drink aware](#)

**The LiverWELL app** (download for Android and iPhone at your app store) **provides direct access to this information, as does the LiverWELL website: [www.liverwell.org.au](http://www.liverwell.org.au)**

### Keep up to date

The following links direct to the sections of these websites with the latest developments.

- [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- [Smart Traveller](#)
- [Health Direct](#)
- [World Health Organisation](#)

### For health care practitioners

Visit [www.hepvic.org.au](http://www.hepvic.org.au) for additional information specifically for health care practitioners.

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