

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

INFORMATION FOR CWU/CEPU MEMBERS

What is Novel Coronavirus?

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new coronavirus primarily affecting people who have recently been in mainland China and Iran, or had contact with a confirmed case of the virus. It's likely that the coronavirus originally came from an animal, and there is now evidence that it can spread from person-to-person.

Symptoms include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath. Shortness of breath is a sign of possible pneumonia that requires prompt medical attention.

The Australian Government Department of Health considers the industrial risk to border staff, including those working in mail and processing, to be low.

Can the virus be contracted through mail handling?

Australian Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly said that the coronavirus was being spread by "droplets" and it was not an airborne disease like measles. They are spread when people cough or sneeze but they rapidly die once they hit a surface. He said someone would have to be in a face-to-face conversation with someone who has coronavirus for at least 15 minutes to be at risk of infection.

It can also be spread via contaminated surfaces if someone touches their nose or mouth after touching a surface that has been coughed or sneezed on by an infected person.

But he said you could not get the disease from parcels and passing someone was "virtually totally safe".

Should I be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)?

The Australian Government Department of Health advises that those working in cargo and mail, processing areas and other areas of air and sea ports are not considered to be at a high risk and that **PPE in the form of gloves, gowns, eye protection or face shields is not considered necessary** when performing these roles.

However, frequent hand-washing (including the proper use of alcohol-based sanitisers) and cough etiquette should still be practiced in this setting.

If a member elects to wear disposable gloves, or other PPE items, regular hand hygiene is still required and care must be taken to avoid breaching the glove material.

A face-mask will not protect you against becoming infected. While the use of face-masks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, face masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like novel coronavirus.

How is spread prevented?

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand gel, before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet;
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow; and
- Do not attend work when sick. **Avail of your sick leave, see your doctor and avoid contact with others.**

This bulletin has been prepared using information provided by the Australian Government Department of Health, current as at 4 March 2020. COVID-19 is an emerging worldwide threat and should the above advice change, we will advise members. Further information is available at the Department of Health's website at: www.health.gov.au

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