

COVID-19 guide

Symptoms, management, and when to get medical help

Symptoms to expect

COVID-19 affects different people in different ways. Most infected people will develop mild to moderate illness and will recover within two (2) weeks. Keep record of your symptoms throughout so you know if symptoms are getting worse.

If at any time you experience shortness of breath when at rest, difficulty breathing, or your symptoms become suddenly worse, call 111 for an ambulance immediately. Don't wait.

Timeline of symptoms

Days 1–3:

You may experience some or none of these symptoms

- Tickle in throat, cough, fever or headache
- Feel short of breath or have chest pressure
- A bout of diarrhoea (runny poo)
- Feel tired
- Lose sense of taste and smell

Days 4–6:

It is important to be more aware of your symptoms during this time.

This is when lung (respiratory) symptoms may start to get worse, especially for older people and people who have other conditions.

- You may start to feel worse
- Have aches, chills and cough
- Are unable to get comfortable

Days 7–8:

- For people with mild illness, the worst is generally over after a week
- Some people may get worse at this point or start to feel better briefly then take a turn for the worse
- **If you start to feel worse, contact your healthcare team**

Days 8–12 (week 2):

Continue to monitor your symptoms and record them in your diary

- You may feel better sleeping on your front/stomach or side
- **If you start to feel worse, contact your healthcare team**

Days 13–14:

- Most people feel better by now
- Some feel more tired than usual
- Severe symptoms or extra treatment may mean longer recover
- A slow return to activity is suggested
- Your healthcare team can advise if you have ongoing severe symptoms
- Keep recording any symptoms

Managing COVID-19 symptoms

Fever

Fever is your body's way of fighting infection and is a common symptom of COVID-19. If you have a high temperature, it can help if you get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Drink enough so your pee is light yellow and clear. You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen if you feel uncomfortable.

- Make sure room temperature is comfortable (not too hot or cold)
- If possible, open a window for fresh air but avoid draughts
- Wear lightweight clothing and use lighter bedding
- Use a cool cloth to wash your face, hands and neck
- Change bed linen and clothing regularly, especially if wet from sweat
- Do not use hot water bottles or electric blankets

Headaches and body aches

Body aches due to COVID-19 can feel like a dull, aching sensation in your muscles. This sensation could affect one or several parts of your body and may range from mild to severe.

Take paracetamol or ibuprofen to help with headaches and body aches. A bath may also be soothing.

Blocked or runny nose

Use saline nose drops or spray to help soothe or clear a stuffy nose. Medicated decongestants such as oxymetazoline (Drixine®) and xylometazoline (Otrivin®) may also be helpful but be aware that they are only for short term use. Do not use them for longer than 7 days. If you use them for longer than this, a more severe congestion of your nose can happen. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about which medication will be the best for you.

Some people find steam inhalation helpful in relieving congestion but there is no scientific evidence that steam inhalation is effective for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19. In fact it may do more harm than good by burning the lining of your lungs. It can also make asthma symptoms worse.

Sore throat

Suck a teaspoon of honey, gargle with salt water, or gargle with warm water to ease a sore throat. Sucking on sugar-free lollies or lozenges also helps. You can also try using a gargle, throat spray or pain-relief (anaesthetic) lozenges.

Managing COVID-19 symptoms (cont.)

Cough

If you have a cough, it's best to avoid lying on your back. Lie on your side or sit upright instead. You may find sucking honey or sipping a hot drink helps ease your cough. It can help to sooth the scratchiness in the back of your throat.

There are a number of cough medicines available on the market. They may be sold in combination with other medicines in cold and cough products, or as cough mixtures or cough lozenges. Cough medicine doesn't cure a cough but may give you some relief from it. There is little evidence to suggest that cough medicine is any more effective than simple home remedies and they're not suitable for everyone. If you are unsure, talk to your pharmacist.

Vomiting (being sick) or diarrhoea (runny poo)

Some people with COVID-19 may get diarrhoea (runny poo), feel sick (nausea), or be sick (vomiting). These symptoms should usually settle within a few days.

Avoid dehydration

The most important thing is to drink plenty of fluids, to avoid dehydration.

- Try sucking ice cubes or ice blocks if you are having trouble keeping fluids down.
- Drink oral rehydration drinks such as Gastrolyte® (available from pharmacies).
- Eat when you feel able to – you don't need to eat or avoid eating any specific foods. Some people find eating bland foods such as crackers, rice or dry toast helpful.

Fizzy drinks, undiluted juices, tea, coffee and sports drinks are not suitable because of their high sugar content. High sugar content is likely to make diarrhoea worse. Read more about dehydration.

Nausea

- Eat when you feel able to – you don't need to eat or avoid eating any specific foods. Some people find eating bland foods such as crackers, rice or dry toast helpful.
- Some people find ginger helpful, taken as ginger tea, ginger-containing foods like soups, or ginger capsules.

If these symptoms are ongoing, talk to your doctor as they may recommend anti-nausea medicines.

When to get help

What to do if you deteriorate (get worse):

The box below provides some general guidance on what to do. Fill in the contact information for your health care team and keep this page handy. If you become more unwell, somebody else might need to find it and make a decision about what to do for you. You can also call the COVID-19 healthline on 0800 358 5453.

It helps to keep a symptom diary so you can keep track of how you are feeling and whether you are getting better, staying the same, or getting worse. You may have been given one when you tested positive for COVID-19. If not, ask your healthcare team or go to the [Health Navigator website](#) and download one.

Call 111 if you:

- have severe trouble breathing or severe chest pain
- are very confused or not thinking clearly
- feel faint or pass out (lose consciousness)

Call your healthcare team if:

- you have new or more trouble breathing
- your symptoms are getting worse
- you start getting better and then get worse
- you have symptoms of severe dehydration such as:
 - Having a very dry mouth
 - Passing only a little urine (pee)
 - Feeling very light-headed (faint)

My doctor's phone number: _____

You may experience very mild or no symptoms

- It is important to stay hydrated — drink plenty of fluids
- Keep monitoring your symptoms so you notice any changes
- It is important to avoid running, strenuous exercise and high impact activities until you are totally well.

For more information about COVID-19 visit hn.org.nz/covid19 or covid19.govt.nz