

SELF-ISOLATION TO SLOW DOWN THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

An outbreak of respiratory illness caused by COVID-19 was first reported in December 2019 by health authorities in Hubei Province, China. Cases also have been identified in travellers from Hubei to other parts of China and now affects more than 60 countries and areas around the world. On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared this outbreak to be a *Public Health Emergency of International Concern*.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The virus probably originated from an animal source, but recent evidence has shown that there is human to human transmission. This virus is transmitted through coughing or contact with respiratory secretions.

Symptoms of COVID-19

The most common symptom is fever. Other symptoms also include cough, sore throat and shortness of breath. In more severe infection, it can result in severe chest infection leading to acute respiratory distress or even death, particularly in the elderly and those with chronic medical problems.

Latest statistics and situation regarding the COVID-19 as of 5 March 2020:

Number of cases	93,865 cases worldwide	
Severity of cases:	Mild:	80%
	Severe:	13.8%
	Critical:	6.1%
% of deaths:	2 – 3% of those infected have died from the infection	

Individuals at highest risk for severe disease and death:

Individuals aged over 60 years old	
Individuals with underlying conditions such as:	Hypertension
	Diabetes
	Cardiovascular disease
	Chronic respiratory disease

	Cancer
	Kidney disease
	Smokers

Individuals at low risk for severe disease and death but still requires caution:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals aged under 19 years old |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease in young children appears to be relatively rare and mild with approximately 2.4% of the total number of reported cases |

Self-isolation as part of the Ministry of Health’s public health measure

It has been three months into the COVID-19 epidemic, and the disease appears to be spreading to more countries. In an effort to prevent and control the disease in Brunei Darussalam, the Ministry of Health has introduced a public health measure known as **self-isolation** for travelers returning from high-risk countries or areas, known as Category A countries or areas.

Self-isolation is about protecting others and slowing down the spread of COVID-19. It is very important that anyone who has the virus, or might have been exposed to it, limits the number of people they come into contact with for 14 days. This is the most effective way of preventing the coronavirus from spreading.

If you are asked to self-isolate, it is important that you follow the advice which is there to help keep you, your loved ones, and your community safe. You must comply with the instructions of the health officer, and failure to do so may result in penalties.

Self-isolation may seem tricky at first, but across Brunei Darussalam, hundreds of people have already successfully done it. If you have been advised to self-isolate, all the instructions you need to follow are available on the Ministry of Health website and the tips in this article should help to make things easier.

Advice for recently returned travellers from Category A countries

If you have recently returned from travel to a Category A country, that is a country with sustained community transmission of COVID-19, or transited through, you must isolate yourself for 14 days on arrival in Brunei Darussalam.

In practical terms, this means that once you reach your residence you must:

- stay at home
- not go to work, school or public areas
- not use public transport
- avoid visitors to your home
- ask friends, family members or delivery services to carry out errands for you - such as getting groceries, medications or other shopping

Stay at home

People who are recommended to be self-isolated should not attend public places, in particular work, school, childcare or university. Only people who usually live in the household should be in the home. **Do not allow visitors into the home.**

There is no need to wear masks in the home, but you limit contact with your household members. Stay in a different room and, maintain a distance of at least two metres from everyone else (e.g. sleeping in separate bed from your spouse, especially if your spouse is not under isolation too).

It is important that you separate yourself from other people in your home and if you share facilities like toilets and bathrooms, regular cleaning will be required. Clean frequently touched surfaces such as bedside tables, bedframe, and other bedroom furniture, bathroom and toilet surfaces daily with regular household cleaners (e.g. Clorox or Dettol) or a diluted bleach solution.

You should stay in a well-ventilated room with a window that can be opened, separate from other people in your home. Open your windows for a few hours every day.

Get others such as friends or family, who are not required to be isolated to get food or other necessities for you.

If you must leave the home, such as to seek medical care, wear a surgical mask if you have one.

Monitor symptoms

When in self-isolation, you should monitor yourself for symptoms. In particular, you should watch out for fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other early symptoms to watch for are chills, body aches, sore throat, headache and runny nose, muscle pain or diarrhoea.

You will also receive regular follow up calls by officers from the Ministry of Health who will enquire about your overall health condition, and also calls to 'spot-check' that you are complying with these measures.

What do I do if I get unwell?

If you develop mild symptoms, isolate yourself from other people and put on a mask if you have one. Call the Health Advice line (2381380 or 2381383) or the designated contact point given to you when you registered at the Port Health counter and tell them your recent travel history.

If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing, call 991 and ask for an ambulance and notify the telephone operator of your recent travel history.

Wash your hands

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses.

You should:

- wash your hands often with soap and water before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet;
- avoid contact with others (including touching, kissing, hugging, and other intimate contact);

- cover your mouth and nose with tissue or into your elbow when you cough and sneeze.

Advice for others in the household

Other members of the household are not required to be isolated unless they have also travelled to a Category A country in the past 14 days. They should maintain a safe distance, and sleep in a separate room from yourself.

Going outside

If you live in a private house, then it is safe for you to go outside into your garden or private outdoor space. Wear a surgical mask if there is anyone else there. If you live in an apartment it is also safe for you to go outside onto your balcony if you have one.

Keeping active while in self-isolation at home

Being isolated can cause you to feel more anxious, bored and stressed. Keeping active and maintaining a normal daily routine as much as possible can help you cope. Some suggestions include:

- Keep in touch with other family and friends by phone, text, e-mail or social media. Talk to them about COVID-19. Understanding the disease will reduce anxiety.
- Think about how you have coped with difficult situations in the past and reassure yourself that you will cope with this situation too. Remember that self-isolation will not last for long.
- Exercise regularly. Options could include exercise DVDs, dancing, floor exercises, home aerobics, walking around the backyard or using home exercise equipment, such as a stationary bicycle, if you have it. Exercise is a proven treatment for stress and depression.
- Arrange with your employer to work from home, if possible.
- Ask your child's school to supply assignments, work sheets and homework by email.
- Treat self-isolation as an opportunity to do some of those things you never usually have time for, such as reading, music, and cooking healthy meals.

Where can I get more information?

Visit the Ministry of Health's dedicated website for COVID-19 at <http://www.moh.gov.bn/SitePages/COVID-19.aspx>

Call the Health Advice Line on 2381380 or 2381383 during office hours or Talian Darussalam 123 after office hours.