

Transfer Quarantine, Protective Quarantine, Quarantine and Isolation

Fact sheet for prisoners – 22 February 2020

What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus.

You can get it by having close face-to-face contact with an infected person, or from people sharing the same household.

The virus is spread by infected people coughing, sneezing or touching and contaminating some surfaces. That's why the best way to protect yourself and others is to practice good personal hygiene.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include loss or changes in sense of smell or taste, fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle soreness, stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, fatigue or tiredness and shortness of breath. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, tell a staff member straight away so you can be checked by the healthcare team.

Who is most at risk of COVID-19?

Anybody can contract COVID-19, which is why everyone entering custody is asked questions to work out their level of risk and are being placed in protective quarantine for 14 days as a safety precaution.

People who have recently travelled overseas, or who have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 have the highest risk of infection. Close contact means spending at least 15 minutes together face-to-face or sharing a closed space (like a room or a car) for at least two hours.

Many people will suffer only mild symptoms; however, some groups are at a higher risk of experiencing severe symptoms. These groups include the elderly and people with underlying illnesses that make them more vulnerable to respiratory disease - including those with diabetes, chronic lung disease, kidney failure and people with suppressed immune systems.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a high-risk group for coronavirus (COVID-19) due to higher rates of pre-existing medical conditions

Management of COVID-19

In order to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Australian Government and health experts have recommended that we use the most effective measures, which includes physical distancing where possible, good hand hygiene quarantine and isolation.

Protective Quarantine

Based on expert health advice, the introduction of Protective Quarantine is in place at designated prisons for all new receptions, since 28 March 2020. This means that all prisoners on entry into prison custody will be required to be in protective quarantine for a 14-day period, after completion of the reception assessment process. This does not apply to prisoners who have been transported to court or to another prison.

Transfer Quarantine

Based on expert health advice, some Transfer Quarantine is in place if you return from certain settings.

Transfer quarantine may apply if you are transferring from the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre to another prison, are returning from the Thomas Embling Hospital, or from an in-person court appearance.

Quarantine for suspected cases of COVID-19

Quarantine for suspected cases of COVID-19 will be in place at every prison to isolate prisoners who health staff have classified as a suspected

case of COVID-19 until a positive or negative COVID-19 diagnosis has been confirmed.

Isolation for confirmed cases of COVID-19

Isolation areas will be in place at designated prisons to accommodate, treat and manage confirmed COVID-19 cases until they have recovered. Confirmed cases will have their health needs met within the isolation area, unless and until such time as their condition requires closer monitoring and care, at which point they will be transferred to a sub-acute unit or other appropriate health facility.

1. Protective Quarantine

What is a protective quarantine area?

A protective quarantine area is a dedicated area for new prisoners to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) in Victorian prisons.

New prisoners will be required to be in protective quarantine for 14 days.

Protective quarantine areas have been established at five prisons – the Melbourne Assessment Prison, Metropolitan Remand Centre, Port Phillip Prison, Ravenhall Correctional Centre and Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

The area is for new prisoners and is not for existing prisoners who are currently accommodated or who are transferred to the five prisons.

Why am I in protective quarantine?

You are being placed in protective quarantine for 14 days to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you are a new prisoner, you are at risk of bringing coronavirus (COVID-19) with you. You might spread the virus to other prisoners or prison staff, even if you do not realise you are sick.

If you have a child coming into prison to reside with you, there is a risk your child may bring coronavirus (COVID-19) in with them.

Everyone plays an important role in stopping the spread of the virus, and decisions are being made in line with the latest medical and health advice.

Why am I being tested for COVID-19?

You will be tested on arriving in prison, and again on day 11 of your protective quarantine period.

The testing will help to keep prisoners and prison staff safe, by identifying anyone who has the virus at an early stage before it has a chance to spread.

The test involves looking for evidence of the virus in samples, usually collected from the back of your throat or nose.

The test itself usually just involves a swab being taken and generally takes less than a minute.

Typically, it takes 24-72 hours for people to get their results after they are tested. Sometimes there can be delays and it can take longer. The health care team will notify you of your results when they are available.

If you test negative, you will continue to stay in protective quarantine for your first 14 days in custody. This is because even if you have been infected, the test could be negative if the virus is still incubating in your body.

It can take up to 14-days from the time you have been infected for symptoms to develop, and by remaining in protective quarantine you can be closely monitored.

If you test positive, you will be moved into a COVID-19 isolation area. The health care team will monitor and care for you during your illness.

How long will I be protective quarantine for?

You will remain in protective quarantine for 14 days, the same recommended time people in the community are being asked to quarantine.

If, at the end of 14 days, you remain well, the health care team will confirm if you are safe to leave the protective quarantine area.

If you start to feel unwell at any point in the 14 days – and especially if you develop any of the

typical symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) – please tell a staff member straight away so you can be checked out by the health care team. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath.

Does this affect all prisons in Victoria?

Protective quarantine areas have been established at five prisons – the Melbourne Assessment Prison, Metropolitan Remand Centre, Port Phillip Prison, Ravenhall Correctional Centre and Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

2. Transfer Quarantine

What is a transfer quarantine area?

A transfer quarantine area is a dedicated area for transferred prisoners, to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) in Victorian prisons.

Why am I in transfer quarantine?

You are being placed in transfer quarantine to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you have recently completed protective quarantine, and have remained in protective quarantine until your transfer, you do not need to complete a period of transfer quarantine.

If you have recently returned from an in-person court appearance, the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre or Thomas Embling Hospital you may be at risk of bringing coronavirus (COVID-19) with you. You might spread the virus to other prisoners or prison staff, even if you do not realise you are sick.

For returns from an in-person court appearance and were in police cells or the Melbourne Custody Centre, you will be required to remain in transfer quarantine for 8 days.

If you have arrived from the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre, you will be placed in transfer quarantine for 8 days.

If you have returned to custody from the Thomas Embling Hospital from Atherton, Argyle or Barossa units, you will be placed in transfer quarantine for 8 days.

Everyone plays an important role in stopping the spread of the virus, and decisions are being made in line with the latest medical and health advice.

Why am I being tested for COVID-19?

You will be tested during your transfer quarantine period.

The testing will help to keep prisoners and prison staff safe, by identifying anyone who has the virus at an early stage before it has a chance to spread.

The test involves looking for evidence of the virus in samples, usually collected from the back of your throat or nose.

The test itself usually just involves a swab being taken and generally takes less than a minute.

Typically, it takes 24-72 hours for people to get their results after they are tested. Sometimes there can be delays and it can take longer. The health care team will notify you of your results when they are available.

If you test negative, you will continue to stay in transfer quarantine for the designated period of time. This is because even if you have been infected, the test could be negative if the virus is still incubating in your body.

If you test positive, you will be moved into a COVID-19 isolation area. The health care team will monitor and care for you during your illness.

If you start to feel unwell at any point in the 14 days – and especially if you develop any of the typical symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) – please tell a staff member straight away so you can be checked out by the health care team. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath.

3. Quarantine for suspected cases of COVID-19

What is a quarantine area?

A quarantine area is a dedicated area for prisoners suspected of having COVID-19 and

awaiting results. All prisons across Victoria will have quarantine areas.

Why am I being quarantined?

You are being quarantined and isolated as you are suspected of having COVID-19. COVID-19 is spread from person to person and it is important that we protect the health and safety of other prisoners and prison staff whilst allowing you to receive the care and treatment you require.

Everyone plays an important role in stopping the spread of the virus, and decisions are being made in line with the latest medical and health advice.

How long will I be quarantined for?

You will remain in quarantine until your test results are returned and the prison's health team confirms you are safe to leave.

What if I test positive to COVID-19?

Your health and the health of other prisoners and prison staff is our biggest concern. If it is confirmed you have COVID -19, you will be moved to an isolation area.

4. Isolation for confirmed cases of COVID-19

What is an Isolation area?

An isolation area is a dedicated area for the physical isolation and health care for prisoners with COVID-19. Isolation areas are at designated prisons across Victoria.

How long will I be isolated for?

Your time in isolation will allow you to be closely monitored, and quickly receive the care you need.

You will remain in the isolation area until the prison healthcare team confirms you are safe to leave.

What care will I receive in isolation?

The isolation area will be staffed 24 hours a day and staff will regularly monitor your physical and mental health and wellbeing. This will include

checking on your symptoms and helping you to manage them.

If you require additional medical attention (for example, if your symptoms are getting worse) or mental health support, please use your cell intercom to let a staff member know. They will notify the health team, who will review you and ensure you are receiving the care you need.

5. Will I be able to leave my cell in transfer quarantine, protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation?

Your ability to leave your cell will be limited and only occur if this can be safely managed and with physical distancing precautions in place.

If you have a confirmed case of COVID-19, you may be able to mix with prisoners who also have COVID-19 within the isolation area. This is because there is no risk of you infecting one another.

6. What about meals, visits and activities to keep me occupied in transfer quarantine, protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation?

All meals will be provided to you in your cell. Prisoners in transfer and protective quarantine will receive an allocation of canteen items, which will be delivered to their cell. You will also be able to purchase additional items from the canteen and these will be delivered to your cell.

You have access to a television and kettle in your cell, and an activity pack including books and other materials.

Professional visits, including with your lawyer, will take place through phone or video calls.

If you are suspected or confirmed as having COVID-19, you will not be able to attend court appearances in person, unless absolutely

necessary, or until the prison's health team determines it is safe for you to do so.

7. How can I contact my family or friends while in transfer quarantine, protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation?

Family and social connection is important and we want to do what we can to make sure you are able to speak to and communicate with them.

While you are in protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation, you will have access to in-cell phone calls, and we are also encouraging you and your family or friends to write letters.

8. What support is available to me while in transfer quarantine, protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation?

Prison and health staff, including Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers and specialist mental health services, will regularly check in and monitor the health and wellbeing of all prisoners, including vulnerable and high-risk people.

Forensic Intervention Services clinicians will provide distress intervention to prisoners at all locations. This is focused on transition, managing distress and wellbeing, supportive counselling and behavioural concerns/issues.

Forensicare and primary health service providers will continue to provide mental health support, support for prisoners in prison for the first time, and an early intervention service to support prisoners who may not fall into any of these categories.

9. Managing your mental health in transfer quarantine, protective quarantine, quarantine or isolation

We know that this situation is difficult and may cause stress for you.

You are encouraged to maintain contact with people who can support you, for example writing to or calling your family and friends. You can also request to see medical staff if you are not coping.

There are a number of ways to support your mental health during this time:

- engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing, such as meditation.
- keep regular sleep routines.
- try to maintain some physical activity if you feel well enough
- establish routines as best possible

