

Tackling the coronavirus

A guide for Local
Aboriginal Land Councils



**New South Wales
Aboriginal Land Council**

The rapid spread of coronavirus, or COVID 19 around the world has dramatically changed our lives. Thousands of people across NSW have lost their jobs, businesses have shut down, travel has stopped, most children are being kept from school, playing and watching sport has been suspended, socialising with family and friends is out and even weddings and funerals can now only be attended by small numbers of people.

But more upsetting than any of this, are the numbers of people who have contracted the disease. As I write this 417,698 people around the world have been infected and 18,614 have died. By the time you read this, these numbers will almost certainly have increased.

We know from past experience and the current circumstances of many of our families that Aboriginal people are at greater risk from COVID 19 than the general population.

As NACCHO CEO, Pat Turner said, "If this virus gets into Aboriginal communities, it will be absolute devastation ... without a doubt."

That's why it's vital that all of us in the Land Rights movement do everything in our power to help stop the spread of COVID 19.

NSWALC has prepared this checklist to help Local Aboriginal Land Councils to work with your staff and members to tackle the virus and save lives in our communities.

Please contact your Zone Director if you need advice or help.



Yours sincerely

Anne Dennis
Chairperson
New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council



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Essential information

What is COVID 19?

The COVID 19 virus originated in late 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan. It appears to have been transmitted from wild animals to humans in a wet market. From there major clusters of the virus rapidly spread to Iran, Italy, the US, Spain, Germany, France and South Korea. By the end of January 2020, COVID 19 had reached Australia. It has now reached most of the world and the rate of its spread is increasing rapidly, with the number of cases doubling every three and a half days.

Although, its symptoms have been described as “flu like”, COVID 19 is ten times deadlier than the flu.

How could it affect Aboriginal people?

Aboriginal people are particularly vulnerable to viral diseases like COVID 19.

A higher proportion of us have underlying health conditions which makes COVID 19 potentially fatal. We also have a greater chance of living in an overcrowded or substandard house, making it harder to prevent transmission.

According to material supplied by NACCHO, First Nations people are 8.5 times more likely to be hospitalised during a virus outbreak. Ten years ago, when swine flu hit our shores Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 11 per cent of all identified cases, 20 per cent of hospitalisations and 13 per cent of deaths.

For these reasons, the federal and state governments have agreed that any Aboriginal person with symptoms will have access to priority testing.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of COVID 19 are fever, cough, fatigue and shortness of breath. However, chills, headaches a sore throat nausea or diarrhoea may also be experienced.



What is social distancing?

Social distancing means staying away from others, so the virus can't spread through contact.

The virus spreads through people coughing or sneezing, but it can also spread through things that people touch such as tables, door handles, cutlery, cups or mobile phones.

So, we need to stay home wherever possible, avoid gatherings of people and keep 1.5 metres clear of others. We should also avoid hugging or shaking hands with people.

As part of practicing social distancing, ordinary LALC Members' meetings should not be held until the government gives clearance for such gatherings to occur.

If you proceed with a members' meeting during the current restrictions, you risk criminal and civil sanctions, but more importantly you may be risking the health and safety of your members. If you have concerns about urgent LALC business, you can contact the Registrar. The Registrar and NSWALC have released further guidance on the suspension of LALC Members' meetings, which is available on the NSWALC website: alc.org.au.

If your LALC Board needs to conduct business during this time, you can consider holding Board meetings by telephone and/or other electronic means, such as Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. If your LALC needs assistance with organising Board meetings we encourage you to seek support and guidance from NSWALC Zone staff.

We need to do this, whether or not we feel sick. It's likely that many people are carrying and transmitting the disease without experiencing symptoms.

The importance of restricting movements means that we will also need to suspend, or postpone some cultural business and sorry business while the threat remains high. If the event is absolutely essential please adhere to the government guidelines around public gatherings. Social distancing is particularly important for Elders who are more vulnerable to the disease.

Why is personal hygiene important?

Soap and sanitizer kill the coronavirus so personal hygiene is crucial to slowing the spread of the disease.

We should wash our hands with soap for at least 20 seconds after we cough or sneeze, go to the toilet, and before making any food. We should also do this after touching any surface that has been touched by others.

It's also important to cough or sneeze into our arms or elbows and try not to touch our face.

We should always put tissues in the bin after use and wash our hands afterwards.

In addition, clean surfaces like doors, tables and benches often as well as the kitchen and bathroom.



Protecting your staff

Are staff aware of the symptoms of coronavirus and personal action to minimise the spread of the disease? Yes / No

If not, distribute the attached handouts.

Are staff with symptoms being tested? Yes / No

If Aboriginal staff have been refused a test contact your Zone Director.

Are staff who are sick being isolated from other staff and members? Yes / No

If space is not available for isolation contact your Zone Director.

Is it possible for staff to work from home? Yes / No

Do they have the technology and space to do this? Is it possible to support them to be able to do this? Yes / No

Contact your Zone Director if you need help with technology to enable staff to work from home.

If staff can't work from home, are appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures available in the office? Yes / No

Have you identified core business that must continue throughout the outbreak, and work that may be able to be temporarily suspended? Yes / No

Are systems in place to ensure workflow and appropriate guidance is given to staff working remotely? Yes / No

Zone Office Contacts

Northern Zone

Ph: 02 6659 1200

Southern Zone

Ph: 02 6124 3555

Eastern Zone

Ph: 02 4337 4700

Western Zone

Ph: 02 6885 7000

Far Western Zone

Ph: 08 8087 7909



Supporting members and their families

Have members been given appropriate information about the symptoms of coronavirus and what they need to do to limit its spread? Yes / No

If not, please circulate the attached handouts.

Do members know how to get in touch with their AMS or mainstream health provider should they get sick? Yes / No

Have members been able to be tested for coronavirus if they are sick? Yes / No

If not, contact your Zone Director.

Are members aware that even some cultural business and sorry business will not be possible while the threat remains high? Yes / No

Have in person LALC member and board meetings been suspended? Yes / No

LALC Members' meetings have been suspended until further notice. LALC Board meetings may be held over the phone. Contact your Zone Director if you need help with holding meetings online.

At home

Have children been made aware of the need for regular hand washing, coughing into their elbows and not sharing utensils? Yes / No

If not, please circulate the attached handouts.

Are there soap, sanitiser and disinfectant to enable regular hand washing and cleaning of surfaces? Yes / No

If there are shortages of these, contact your Zone Director.

Is there able to be a room set aside to quarantine people who become sick? Yes / No

If no quarantine space is available, contact your Zone Director.



At work

If members have become unemployed, have they applied for JobSeeker allowance? Do they need help to do this? Yes / No

Please let your Zone Director know of any problems with this.

At school

Have the children of members been sent home from school? Yes / No

Have they received home study materials from the school? Yes / No

Do they need help accessing these? Yes / No

Is there a quiet place in the home available for supervised study? If not, are you able to provide some help with this? Yes / No

Contact your Zone Director if children are experiencing problems with studying remotely.

Elders

Are Elders aware of the symptoms and preventative measures? Yes / No

Are Elders practising social distancing? Yes / No

Is there a family member or other support person who is regularly checking on them? Yes / No

Are they able to access groceries and transport to medical services? Are we able to help with this? Yes / No

Contact your Zone Director if you are experiencing problems assisting Elders with regular contact, transport, groceries or other matters.



Travelling to other communities

The virus moves from person to person so travelling to another community could infect that whole community. We need to think long and hard before leaving home for any reason.

Have you assessed yourself for symptoms before you consider travelling to a different community? Yes / No

If you or a close connection have experienced symptoms please reconsider your trip to the community.

Have you recently returned from overseas? Yes / No

If so, you need to self-isolate for 14 days and are not allowed to travel to another community until after this is done.

Are you a regular resident of this community? Yes / No

If not please reconsider your trip to the community.

Is your travel to the community essential? Yes / No

It is best that you stay at home and limit movement where possible.

Are the community aware that you are coming? Yes / No

If not, please reconsider your trip to the community.

How many people are coming with you? _____

If you are coming with more than one other person please reconsider your trip to the community.

Does the community have a place for you to self-isolate for 14 days? Yes / No

If not, please reconsider your trip to the community.

How long do you intend to stay in the community? _____

If you are not staying for an extended period of time please reconsider your visit.



Key Contacts

- If you feel unwell or think you have symptoms of COVID 19, contact the Health Direct Helpline on **1800 022 222**.
- For more information on COVID 19, contact the National Coronavirus Helpline on **1800 020 080**.
- For mental health support contact the Mental Health Line on **1800 011 511**.
- To find your nearest Aboriginal Medical Service go to:
<https://www.ahmrc.org.au/about/members/>
- For the latest information go to:
<https://www.health.gov.au>; and
<https://preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>
- For COVID-19 resources from the Centre for Aboriginal Health, visit:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/covid-19-resources.aspx-#Aboriginal>

