

Q & A – Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Will we be testing for COVID-19 on island?

At present it is not possible to test for COVID-19 on island and as such a precautionary approach is being put in place which means any suspect cases will be treated as though it is COVID-19. If this changes and a different method of testing becomes available we may be able to test in the future.

Will we stop flights or close borders?

Stopping flights and ships is not only unrealistic but is unlikely to be effective. We are reliant on the outside world for food, fuel and medication so total isolation is not possible. The vast majority of individuals on Ascension will be OK even if they contract COVID-19, and the procedures and measures we have in place are there to manage an outbreak as effectively as possible were it to arrive on island, limiting its effect on those who would be worst affected. We are fortunate there are so few routes onto the island as it means we have been able to put in place better screening measures than many other parts of the world.

What screening measures are in place?

We are screening all air passengers at the point of departure for symptoms and travel history. Anyone who arrives on Ascension displaying symptoms will be asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days. Anyone at all who starts to feel symptoms, regardless of recent travel, should go home and call the hospital.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms are similar to the flu, but the key things to look out for are a new persistent dry cough, a fever or shortness of breath.

Anyone who develops a new persistent dry cough, a fever or experiences shortness of breath, regardless of travel history, should self-isolate straight away and telephone the hospital on 66252 for further advice.

What does self-isolation mean?

Anyone displaying possible symptoms of COVID-19 will be asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days. The incubation period of COVID-19 is between two to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected.

Self-isolation will involve remaining at home without coming into contact with anyone who is not also self-isolating with them. They will need to ask friends and family to help with supplies of food and other essentials whilst they are self-isolating, or if this is not possible request their employer provides assistance in sourcing and delivering these. They will receive a daily telephone check from AIG authorities, and if they are determined to be healthy by authorities they will no longer need to self-isolate. If they need any further assistance during self-isolation authorities will be on hand to provide it.

Should people self-isolate away from their families?

No. Based on local circumstances it is best for whole families to self-isolate together despite the wider impact of this. The hospital is aware of a handful of people with underlying health conditions who are at a higher risk of more serious illness were they to contract COVID-19,

and these can be dealt with on a case-by-case basis if they live other people and are therefore unable to practice social distancing methods.

What does social distancing mean?

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within two metres or less) with an infected person. Therefore the objective of social distancing is to reduce the probability of contact between persons carrying an infection, and others who are not infected. In doing so this should reduce the ability of the disease to be transmitted and spread. Self-isolation is a form of social distancing, as are other preventative public health measures, ranging from avoiding close contact with others by not shaking hands to temporarily preventing large public gatherings.

Who is most at risk?

People who are over the age of 65 are at a higher risk of developing a severe case of COVID-19, as are people who have underlying health conditions like high blood pressure, kidney disease, cancer or diabetes. Taking the measures identified to prevent the spread of COVID-19 means that if people in these at risks groups were to contract the virus, the hospital will be better equipped to give them the help they require.

At what point would we close clubs, school, etc.?

At present the strategy is to ask anyone displaying symptoms to self-isolate. This should help to slow or prevent the onward transmission of the virus. If an outbreak is suspected on Ascension measures will be adapted to deal with the situation as it develops.

We are not at the stage where we are requesting public gatherings and events to be postponed or the school to be temporarily closed. We are aware of the wider impact closing the school will have on the community so any decision to do so will only be taken if it is in the interest of public health.

Do we have sufficient supplies to deal with an outbreak?

The hospital already has supplies of critical equipment and medicines and is coordinating with the UK authorities to secure further supplies.

What happens if Dr Bill or other hospital staff contract COVID-19?

Measures to slow, and where possible to prevent, the spread of the virus are in place and this needs to be the priority at this point. Anyone showing signs of illness will be asked to self-isolate without directly interacting with hospital staff beyond by telephone. Self-isolation of individuals will help prevent transmission of any illness to healthcare professionals. Hospital staff will only be involved in severe cases where the illness has other health implications.

How can I prevent myself catching COVID-19?

Although nothing will ever be 100% effective in preventing individuals from catching any virus, simple measures can be followed which will improve your chances of not catching a virus (including COVID-19). Everyone should practice simple but thorough hand hygiene, washing hands with soapy water for 20 seconds whenever possible. Good respiratory and cough hygiene is also important, covering your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing your nose, cleaning your hands afterwards. Basic social distancing is also effective to a degree. .