



**VIRGIN AUSTRALIA GROUP**  
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31 January 2020

Michael Kaine  
National Secretary  
TWU

**By email**

**Re: Coronavirus**

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter in relation to the Coronavirus.

Yesterday a joint union forum on the Virgin Australia Group's response to the coronavirus situation was convened. There were representatives of the Transport Workers Union at this forum and many of the queries made in your letter were responded to during that session.

Nevertheless, we have provided comprehensive responses to the specific questions in your letter below.

The Virgin Australia Group Medical Team, led by Dr Sara Souter, has been continuously monitoring the 2019 novel coronavirus situation and liaising with experienced infectious diseases specialists, the World Health Organisation (WHO), other airlines, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Group Medical's role is to protect our team members and passengers and provide reliable and accurate evidence-based advice.

We appreciate that our team members have concerns about the virus. We are keeping them updated as a matter of priority via several channels.

The following details are in response to your letter and are current as of today.

**Any advice workers are receiving about the virus, how it is transmitted, what precautions they need to take and how they can minimise infection**

- Workers are being updated regularly through communications from the Group including the Group Medical Team. These communications are being sent via email to all staff upon release and is also available on the intranet.
- As new information comes to light, information provided to the Group is updated.
- There have been three briefings to date, with further communications to be released today to incorporate information as at 31 January. Today's communications also included a video from the Virgin Australia Group Medical Officer, Dr Sara Souter.
- Current verified medical information, to date has included WHO recommendations for hand washing, updated information on masks and onboard precautions, as well information on transmission by baggage, and cleaning of aircraft.



Anyone who has been in contact with a confirmed case or suspected case is being advised to self-isolate as per current health authority guidance

#### **Any protective gear or equipment they are being provided with**

- We are loading additional personal protective equipment onto all group aircraft. This equipment includes masks and hand sanitiser.
- Personal protective equipment is also being made available to team members at airports.
- This equipment will be provided as a matter of priority.
- These supplies are to ensure that team members can effectively isolate anyone with symptoms and maintain proper hand sanitation

#### **Any advice team members are being given about wearing or not wearing protective masks and other protective gear and equipment**

- Respiratory viruses tend to be more efficiently transferred by touch than by breathing.
- According to WHO medical advice supported by the Queensland Government Chief Medical Officer, good hand and cough hygiene is by far the most effective way to prevent infection.
- Team members have been advised to use masks when in close contact with a passenger showing symptoms.
- Masks are not recommended by WHO to be used by crew or any other person (including guest services or pit crew team members) as a long-term preventative strategy as long-term wear encourages the growth of microbes.
- While masks are effective in minimising the spread of infection when used by a person who is unwell or by someone in very close personal proximity with an unwell person, they are generally ineffective when used by individuals who are well.
- Frequent and careful washing and drying of hands is a much more effective and important protection than wearing a mask.
- However, team members are being advised that they will not be prevented from wearing a mask if this makes them feel more comfortable. A communication to this effect is intended to go out to team members today.
- Team members who do choose to wear a mask are also being advised that:
  - Masks are not to be worn while making passenger announcements, in particular safety announcements to ensure clear communication on board the aircraft.
  - Masks are not to be worn during the aircraft safety demonstration as guests may perceive that it's acceptable to fit an oxygen mask while wearing a mask.
  - Masks are to be removed during non-standard events, in particular during emergency events when crew are required to don emergency equipment including an Oxygen Mask or PBE.



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### **Any specific training they are being given related to the outbreak**

If a traveller onboard an aircraft has signs and symptoms indicative of acute respiratory infections, there is an existing procedure in the Cabin Crew Manual which all cabin crew are trained in specifically refer to current procedures Manual A4: Cabin Crew Policy and Procedures *Section 11.7.3.1 Managing Ill Passenger In flight*. That procedure requires the following process be followed by a crew member:

- Request the ill passenger or crew member use a face mask (available on A330 aircraft effective 25 January 2020 and all other VA Group aircraft will be loaded over the coming days)
- Encourage the passenger to practice cough etiquette when coughing or sneezing – cough or sneeze into disposable tissues or clothing (such as elbow crease)
- Supply an airsickness bag to dispose of used tissues and request the person wash their hands
- Crew should use hand sanitiser/wash hands following contact with any passenger or other crew
- If possible, allocate a specific toilet/lavatory for the use of affected passengers/crew only.
- Where possible, crew should stay 1 metre or more away from passengers who are ill unless wearing appropriate PPE (masks, gloves and hand sanitiser).

Similar guidance to the above has also been provided to both Tigerair and VARA cabin crew members.

All Virgin Australia Group carriers have the services of Medlink to call upon in a medical event for notification and treatment advice. Medlink can be contacted for guest health advice both on the ground and in flight.

Should a crew member become ill inflight the above procedures are also to be followed along with the above procedures are also relevant should a crew member become ill in flight

### **Any changes that have been introduced regarding prevention and detection of the virus, including deployment of medical staff and other personal**

- Group Medical team is continuously monitoring the coronavirus situation and will keep team members updated on any changes to the information which has been provided.

### **Any support services team members have been advised they can access if they have any concerns**

- All staff have been advised to contact their health provider if they have any symptoms or concerns, as per the most recent Australia public health and WHO advice.
- Staff can also call VA Care on 1300 784 832 or +61 7 3295 3958 to advise they are experiencing symptoms. Processes have been put in place for VA Care to notify Virgin Australia Workplace Health and Safety immediately.
- Staff can also contact Group Medical on +61 2 8985 7400. While the situation evolves the team are in touch with Health Authorities.
- Team members are also encouraged to contact their own GP and state-based services are also a good point of call



- An online form has been set up whereby staff can ask questions of Group Medical (which will assist the team in handling the volume of enquiries and group the common questions). The questions will be collated, answers will be supplied via the latest brief and internal communications. Questions can also be emailed to [aviationmedicine@virginaustralia.com](mailto:aviationmedicine@virginaustralia.com).
- Team members are also being reminded that they can access the Group's employee assistance program, MyCoach (which also has onsite services at Virgin Australia ports).

We ask our staff to continue following guidance from Group Medical and to contact VA Care, their leaders or their GP as per current Australian health authority guidance.

A copy of the latest Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which was made available to all team members is attached for your information.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Scurrah".

Paul Scurrah  
Chief Executive Officer

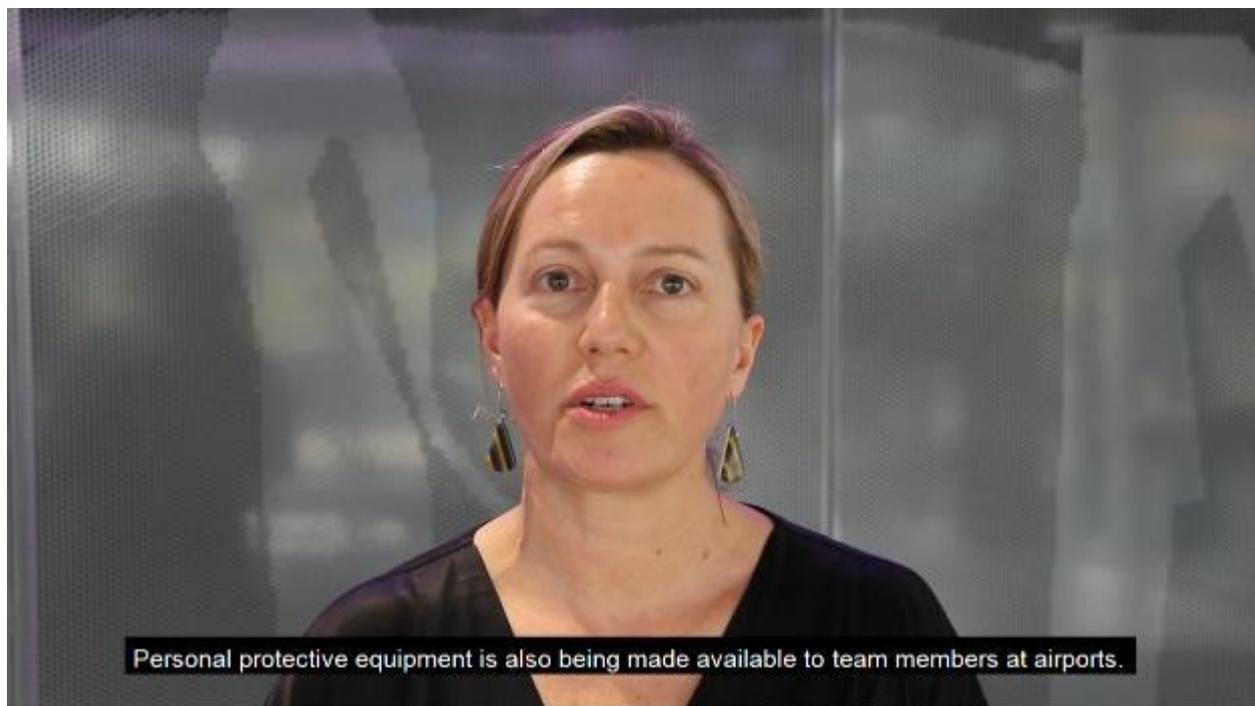
# Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) FAQs



Virgin Australia Group Medical is closely following all advice received from Australian medical authorities, as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO), regarding precautions that are needed to minimise risks concerned with the 2019 novel coronavirus.

The WHO is the point of reference for any public health emergency:  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

Click the image below to view the guidance from our Group Medical Officer, Dr Sara Souter.



Click [here](#) to view the WHO video:

## **Virgin Australia Group Medical updates**

Safety Systems and Group Medical will continue to review the latest information from WHO and update this document regularly.

## What we know about coronavirus

### **What is coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia and bronchitis. They are transmitted between animals and people.

2019-nCoV (novel coronavirus) is a new strain of coronavirus that had not been previously identified in humans. The coronavirus outbreak began around a fish and animal market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in December and has spread to other centres in China and a number of other countries.

### **What are the common signs of coronavirus infection?**

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. The commonest early symptom is high temperature (fever) followed a few days later by respiratory symptoms such as cough and shortness of breath.

### **When is a person contagious?**

So far we don't know when the contagious period begins. However, it is usual with viral infections that the most contagious time is when the symptoms are at their worst.

### **Current risk of Coronavirus**

- At this stage, outside of mainland China, the risk of catching coronavirus infection is low. The only confirmed cases in the world outside mainland China add up to around 100, all of them in isolation. That includes cases in Hong Kong and Australia.
- The background risk of catching a different viral infection (common cold virus, influenza etc) from close contact with humans is unchanged from before this outbreak.
- The advice of IATA and ICAO on management of in-flight illness or passengers with respiratory symptoms is unchanged from before this outbreak.
- This risk could change and is being monitored daily by Group Medical.

### **Which countries currently have confirmed cases?**

The most severely affected is mainland China with increasingly large numbers. At the moment a small but growing number of countries outside China have a few cases each. So far, the vast majority appear to be people who have travelled from Wuhan China or had close household/hospital contact with someone with the infection.

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## Are there any restrictions to travel or trade from China?

Based on currently available information, WHO does not recommend any restriction of travel or trade to China. There are, however, a number of strict travel restrictions in place in various Chinese cities, especially in Hubei province.

As a precaution:

- China has suspended outbound travel from Wuhan City and several other cities.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has issued recommendation not to travel to Hubei Province.
- The CDC has issued a Level 3 Travel notice (Avoid non-essential travel to China).
- Guidelines for entry/exit screening have been issued by the WHO for countries or areas with ongoing transmission of 2019-nCoV.

## Is it safe to go to Hong Kong? Will the Company cancel flights to Hong Kong?

Hong Kong's number of cases is about the same as Australia's, and stringent quarantine controls are in place. Health screening of passengers is also in place. At this stage, Virgin Australia considers that it is safe to continue to operate to Hong Kong. However, this is continuing to be reviewed in accordance with medical advice.

## Can I travel to other affected regions?

So far, there is very little transmission other than by close personal contact in the same household or in healthcare/hospital settings. Travel to regions without community transmission should be safe.

# How do I protect myself?

## How can I protect myself from coronavirus?

Coronavirus typically cause respiratory symptoms.

Standard WHO recommendations to prevent infection spread include:

- Avoid large crowds of people;
- Avoid close contact or visiting with anyone showing signs of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing;
- Regular hand washing, avoiding hand contact with others if possible (wash/alcohol-based hand rub after touching others);
- Covering mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing and sneezing – throw the tissue away immediately and wash hands;
- Thoroughly cooking meat seafood and eggs;
- Avoid exposure to live animals in affected regions unless necessary;
- Avoid travel if unwell with respiratory illness;
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider.

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## Should I get a flu shot?

- Ensure you are up-to-date with your annual influenza immunisation
- Aside from the direct health benefits, this will minimise the risk of an infection being mistaken for coronavirus and necessitating isolation if unwell.

## What should I do if I become ill?

Any individual that is showing symptoms and meets the following criteria should

- **Stay at home;**
- **Call** their healthcare provider – or if severely ill, hospital – for assessment.

Particularly if you have:

- Travelled from Wuhan City, (Hubei Province, China) in the 14 days before illness onset; **OR**
- Travelled to an area with evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission, or a declared outbreak, within 14 days before the onset of illness; **OR**
- Had close contact with a confirmed case of 2019-nCoV coronavirus.

## AND

- Have fever – or history of fever and acute respiratory infection – with at least one of the following symptoms:
  - Shortness of breath
  - Cough; or
  - Sore throat.

## I cannot attend my rostered duty because I need to care for my child who is not able to attend school, kindergarten or daycare because I or my child have recently travelled to mainland China or Hong Kong, what should I do?

We are aware that some education departments and schools have advised that students who have travelled to mainland China or Hong Kong in the previous 14 days or in some circumstances whose family members have travelled to those destinations cannot attend school, kindergarten or daycare for a 14 day period after leaving China including Hong Kong.

If you have been notified that your child is not able to attend their school, kindergarten or daycare due to the coronavirus situation and you need to stay at home to care for them, you may take personal/carer's leave.

If you need to take personal/carer's leave in these circumstances, you should follow the usual notification procedures to notify the Company of your need to take personal/carer's leave.

## What precautions can I take to ensure my safety while on duty?

Crew should take all possible precautions when flying to Hong Kong or any other destination on our network as recommended by the Virgin Australia Group Medical Team. A video outlining what precautions should be taken is available [here](#) and these FAQs will continue to be updated.

## Should I be tested for coronavirus?

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If you have been, or you think you may have been, in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus and you develop symptoms including fever and acute respiratory infection and at least one of the following:

- Shortness of breath;
- Cough;
- Sore throat;

Call your medical provider and tell them your concerns.

## **Someone has come into the office with flu symptoms. What should I do?**

Speak with your manager or team leader or speak with the team member directly and ask them to adopt hygiene practices including a mask. It may be more appropriate for the team member to go home and stay at home until they are well.

## **I am a cabin crew or flight crew member who operates to Hong Kong, is it safe for me to fly to Hong Kong?**

Currently we consider it remains safe for our crew members to be travelling to Hong Kong. We still recommend that crew take all possible precautions when flying to Hong Kong or any other destination on our network in accordance with the advice provided by the Virgin Australia Group Medical Team. We will continue to review this in accordance with medical advice.

The Virgin Australia Group Medical Team, led by Dr Sara Souter, has been continuously monitoring the coronavirus situation and liaising with experienced infectious diseases specialists, the World Health Organisation (WHO), other airlines, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

Crew should take all possible precautions when flying to and from Hong Kong as recommended by the Virgin Australia Group Medical Team. A video outlining what precautions should be taken is available [here](#) and these FAQs will continue to be updated.

In these circumstances, you should not attend work and see your healthcare provider or contact VA Care for further advice, including about testing for coronavirus.

## **I have just returned from a location with local transmission of the virus. Should I stay away from the office?**

There is no need to quarantine yourself. However, if you develop symptoms such as fever, cough or breathing problems, contact a doctor for advice and do not go to work.

# Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) FAQs



**Our office has visitors from many countries, and some may have visited affected areas recently. What precautions should we take? I am holding a meeting with people who may have visited China recently, what precautions should we take?**

Continue to practice simple hygiene techniques, avoid handshakes and wash your hands frequently.

**It has been confirmed that an infected passenger travelled on a Tigerair aircraft. Is it safe for me to operate on that aircraft?**

The Tigerair aircraft was taken out of service immediately we were notified and has undergone a thorough clean in accordance with the cleaning protocols in place for this type of event. This includes using approved cleaning solutions and disinfectants to clean the flight deck, cabin interior, all surfaces, carts and catering equipment. Safety instruction cards, magazines, sick bags and menus have also been removed from seat pockets and replaced.

**I operated on the same aircraft that the Tigerair coronavirus case was confirmed in the days following. Am I at risk?**

Based on the medical advice we have received, the risk to passengers and crew travelling on that aircraft between 27 and 30 January is low.

If, however, you are feeling unwell or have flu-like symptoms, please see your GP or contact the Group Medical team.

**Is Aviation Australia affected by the Queensland Health direction to educational institutions in relation to the coronavirus?**

As an educational provider, Aviation Australia is required to follow the advice from Queensland Health issued on 29 January 2020 for all students, teachers, staff and attendees at Aviation Australia facilities.

The advice means that any Virgin Australia Group crew or employees who:

- are in contact of any confirmed novel coronavirus case should not attend Aviation Australia for 14 days following exposure;
- have visited China, including Hong Kong, must not attend Aviation Australia for 14 days after leaving China or Hong Kong.

We are assessing crew who may be impacted by this directive and we are exploring other training options and encourage crew who may have travelled to these destinations on their own time to notify their leader. Crew control will be in contact with impacted crew members to discuss this further.

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## Is NZ School of Tourism (NZST) in AKL affected in relation to the coronavirus?

As an educational provider servicing a high number of international students, NZST has decided to take precautionary steps to prevent the virus spreading on campus. They have provided the following advice relevant for Virgin Australia Group crew or employees:

- Students and staff who have been to or have had a family member come from mainland China must not come to any UP Education campus (NZST) for at least 14 days after their arrival into New Zealand.
- Following the 14-day isolation period, students and staff can return as per normal to the NZST provided they have not had any changes to their health during this time.

We encourage crew who may have travelled to these destinations on their own time to notify their leader.

## Contact with the general public through work

### What should Cabin Crew and Flight Crew do if passengers are showing symptoms onboard?

If a traveller onboard an aircraft is displaying signs that they may be unwell (for example coughing or fever) indicative of acute respiratory infections:

Refer to current procedures Manual A4: Cabin Crew Policy and Procedures *Section 11.7.3.1 Managing Ill Passenger In flight.*

- Contact your Leader, Cabin Supervisor or Flight Manager who will assess the guest's condition and where appropriate contacting MedLink for further advice.
- If a guest is wearing a mask this is not necessarily a sign that they are unwell, and you should avoid making judgments about a person's health solely on the basis they are wearing a mask. Some guests may choose to wear a mask either because this is the advice they have received from the health authorities in the countries they originate from or because of personal preference.
- Request the ill passenger or crew member use a face mask (loading completed on A330 aircraft effective 25 January and all other VA Group aircraft will be loaded over the coming days).
- Encourage them to practice cough etiquette when coughing or sneezing – cough or sneeze into disposable tissues or clothing (such as elbow crease).
- Supply an airsickness bag to dispose of used tissues and request the person wash their hands.
- Crew should use hand sanitiser/wash hands following contact with any passenger or other crew.
- If possible, allocate a specific toilet/lavatory for the use of affected passengers/crew only.
- Where possible, crew should stay 1 metre or more away from passengers who are ill unless wearing appropriate PPE.

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## What should I do if I think a passenger is unwell while on the ground?

- If a passenger is showing signs and symptoms, you should initially contact your guest services leader.
- Your leader will follow the usual process where a passenger may be unwell including assessing the guest's condition and where appropriate contacting MedLink for further advice.
- If a guest is wearing a mask this is not necessarily a sign that they are unwell, and you should avoid making judgments about a person's health solely on the basis they are wearing a mask. Some guests may choose to wear a mask either because this is the advice they have received from the health authorities in the countries they originate from or because of personal preference.

## What should I do if a guest has concerns about sitting near someone who is wearing a mask?

- Reassure the guest that wearing a mask is not necessarily a sign that a person is unwell
- Some guests choose to wear a mask either because this is the advice they have received from the health authorities in the countries they originate from or because of personal preference.
- In accordance with usual process, if the guest's concerns lead to disruption in the cabin, you should contact your Cabin Supervisor who will make a decision about the appropriate course to take to respond to this.

## What is the Captain required to report?

All aircraft entering Australian territory are legally required to report ill passengers and crew on the pre-arrival report. Refer to current procedures outlined in Manual A4 Cabin Crew Policy and Procedures Section 11.7.3.1 Managing Ill Passenger In flight.

Cabin Crew can also request assistance from MedLink if required. In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness before, during or after travel, travellers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share travel history with their health care provider.

## Can coronavirus spread through the cabin air system?

WHO and aircraft manufacturers advise that modern aircraft have a cabin air system which delivers approximately 50% outside air and 50% filtered, recirculated air. The recirculated air employs High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters that have a similar performance to those used to keep the air clean in hospital operating rooms and industrial clean rooms. These are effective at capturing greater than 99.9% of the airborne microbes in the filtered air. Aircraft air supply is essentially sterile and particle-free.

HEPA filters will continue to be changed at the intervals recommended by the filter manufacturer and Engineering.

The risk onboard continues to be through direct contact, if people are unwell at the time of travel. This risk of transmission is low.

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## Can I catch the virus through contact with bags?

WHO advises packages or luggage should not pose a risk, including baggage arriving from areas where cases have been reported.

This also applies to hand carried cabin baggage of a passenger suspected of infection.

Most viruses are spread through direct contact with bodily fluids from an infected person. The standard recommended is to use proper hand hygiene and wash your hands frequently.

## Should I wear a mask on board?

Wearing a mask is an effective measure when worn by a person who has an infection but only to protect those around them. It is much less effective for protecting the wearer. This is due to the mask accumulating moisture when worn for long periods of time, which can encourage the growth of microbes.

Masks are also useful when directly dealing with someone who is currently sick, such as in a healthcare setting, or when dealing with someone who has become unwell on board. Respiratory viruses tend to be more efficiently transferred by touch than by breathing. Frequent and careful washing and drying of hands is a much more effective and important protection than wearing a mask.

## More about masks and coronavirus

- Transfer of respiratory viruses occurs more efficiently by touch (for example, handshakes) than by breathing.
- The wearing of surgical masks – on board or casually in the street – is not an effective protection against contracting infections.
- Such masks are designed to trap large droplets, and their use is primarily for protecting others FROM the wearer of the mask – hence their use in operating theatres.
- They are used for putting on a sick person to reduce their chance of coughing on others. In this situation a sealing filter (P2) mask is preferred.
- They are also used by health care workers, or indeed by a crew member attending to a sick passenger, for short-term encounters with someone who is known to be sick, in association with careful handwashing procedures.
- The masks leak, and long-term mask wearing results in accumulation of moisture.
- In order to prevent transfer, the most important single protection remains good hand hygiene – handwashing and drying, supplemented by hand sanitiser use.

## Can Ground Crew catch the virus through contact with passengers?

Human-to-human spread has been identified with Coronavirus.

Use the standard precautions to reduce the spread of respiratory infections, including washing hands frequently and practicing good cough hygiene.

If a guest is showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing and has been to an effected area recently, encourage them to practice cough hygiene, and see their doctor advising of their recent travel history.

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## **Can Cleaners catch the virus when cleaning an aircraft?**

The same information applies as for crew handling baggage or passengers with respiratory symptoms.

Thoroughly wash hands/use alcohol wipes and practice good hygiene. Clean as per SOPs using any applicable PPE.

WHO will advise if there are any specific precautions to take. At present there are no changes to standard WHO guidance.

## **What is Virgin Australia doing for guests?**

Currently, there are no requirements for us to take any further precautions with our flights to and from Hong Kong. We are advising any guests who are showing respiratory symptoms to contact their local GP as a matter of priority.

We have a commercial policy in place for any guest travelling from Wuhan and transiting through Hong Kong onto a Virgin Australia service. This policy allows guests to change the date or destination of their travel, as well as receive a full refund or Travel Bank credit.