

External Protocol

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 2020

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

It is an illness caused by a new type of coronavirus that affects humans.

Coronaviruses are viruses that spread among animals. Some of them can also affect humans and cause respiratory problems, although the symptoms they produce are mostly mild.

How is it transmitted?

Via the respiratory tract, through small droplets that are expelled by coughing or sneezing. It is also transmitted through objects that have been contaminated.

What is the incubation period?

From two days up to a maximum of two weeks.

What are the symptoms?

Fever, difficulty breathing, cough and general malaise. In more severe cases, pneumonia, respiratory failure and other complications may occur.

Which groups are most at risk?

People over the age of 65, pregnant women, children under five and people with chronic conditions (e.g. heart and lung diseases) and reduced immunity.

Is there a cure for COVID-19?

At present, there is no cure for the virus. However, there are many treatments to help ease the symptoms.

Source: the Ministry of Health's Canal Salut website.

2. THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORONAVIRUS

The **government** has implemented a **strategy to ensure complete coordination between all ministries**, led by the Ministry of Health.

The **Ministry of Business and Knowledge** is managing any **coronavirus-related queries and concerns from Catalan companies and corporate actors** via the Catalan Tourist Board, the Catalan Consumer Agency, the Catalan Trade, Crafts and Fashion Consortium and ACCIÓ, depending on the nature of the information requested.

- **More generally, the government is communicating the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health** (*see page 11 - General preventive hygiene measures for individual protection against respiratory diseases (Ministry of Health)*).
- **Businesses are advised to do the following:**
 - Always keep the workplace clean, particularly frequently used areas (whiteboards, changing rooms, canteens and kitchens, etc.).
 - Encourage employees to wash their hands frequently.
 - Provide paper tissues for those who need them, and closed receptacles where they can be discarded.

- If any employees have to travel, find out about the conditions at the destination and any health-related requirements that have been put in place by the local health authorities.
- Avoid sending employees who are at a higher risk of more severe complications (e.g. those with diabetes, heart disease or lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is present.
- Keep calm at all times and prevent any discriminatory behaviour towards specific groups of people. Preventive actions will help protect companies and their employees.
- If any employees have flu-like symptoms, make sure they stay at home and call 061. Working from home may be a good option.
 - Companies may oblige employees to work from home when there is good reason to do so (such as a justified suspicion of infection, e.g. for employees who have come into contact with the disease or have been to high-risk areas) and when the measure is temporary (i.e. for a limited period of time, given that the incubation period is from two days to two weeks).
 - Employees cannot unilaterally decide to work from home, unless company policy allows them to do so. Before an employee can work from home, he or she must obtain the company's consent and agreement.

3. COMPANIES THAT DO BUSINESS WITH CHINA: THINGS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT

Catalan companies that do business with China must take the following into account (*this information will be updated periodically*):

China has been gradually recovering its productive and commercial capacity. The Chinese government is encouraging a gradual return to work, provided that companies adopt the appropriate safety measures and do not expose their employees to any health risks. Although we cannot specify a precise date on which China's economic activity will return to normal, all signs suggest that we will see improvements over the coming weeks. Stringent restrictions and quarantine conditions remain in place in the province of Hubei to control the spread of COVID-19.

The nine key considerations to take into account are detailed below.

1. Public administrations and services: the majority of China's public administrations, ports, airports and customs facilities are now operational, although they are not yet operating at full capacity. Public officials have been the first to return to work. Specific safety measures have been implemented in each instance and working hours are more flexible. The central government has delegated decision-making powers to regional governments, ministries and associations, which are responsible for making companies and employees aware of the safety measures before the imminent return of employees to the workplace.

2. Factories and the private sector: most factories and companies have resumed activity after obtaining authorization from the local authorities and implementing measures to ensure the safety of their employees. However, factories are not yet believed to have returned to full capacity, given that people are returning to work gradually. Production activities are expected to return to normal by mid-March.

3. Exporting goods to China: logistics operators have confirmed a gradual increase in shipments to China. The fact that customs facilities at Chinese ports were closed for almost three weeks has resulted in a major backlog of work and shipments of goods waiting to be processed. However, the Chinese government is firmly committed to international trade and has stated that it will provide the necessary resources to expedite this process, provided that safety measures remain unchanged.

4. Importing goods from China: there are no restrictions on importing goods from China. The opening of the country's ports means that the first shipments from China are now being processed. However, due to the trade restrictions that have been in place over the last few weeks, delays to future imports are anticipated. This may cause supply issues for Catalan companies. All companies are advised to begin making arrangements for future imports with their freight forwarders to safeguard their supply channels.

5. Personal mobility: China is still issuing business and tourist visas. However, the Chinese Consulate recommends delaying any non-essential travel until the situation has stabilized. The quarantine situation in China has led to the cancellation of many face-to-face meetings, and the number of Chinese participants at international events over the coming weeks is expected to be reduced. Additionally, the Chinese government has cancelled all trade fairs that were due to take place in the country in March as a preventive measure.

6. Freight transport by sea: all of China's ports are now operating normally. Logistics operators recommend making arrangements as soon as possible and as far in advance as possible to prevent shipping companies from carrying out blank sailing in the event of insufficient demand. Experts do not expect transport costs to increase in early March. However, from the third week of March and up to April, shipping costs and delivery capacities will be unpredictable.

7. Land transport: although many road hauliers are now operational, the safety measures imposed by the Chinese government may have an impact on their normal working hours and productivity levels.

8. Freight transport by air: providers of express courier services continue to deliver to the country's main cities, albeit at an increased cost. However, it is difficult to deliver goods to certain provinces, owing to the preventive safety measures that have been imposed on couriers. From the second week in March onwards, many companies are expected to send their goods by air instead of by sea, which may cause a substantial increase in transport costs. Clients are advised to make their air freight arrangements as soon as possible.

9. Travel insurance: most travel insurance policies tend to exclude (among other risks) healthcare coverage for officially declared epidemics or pandemics. Consequently, coronavirus will be excluded from healthcare coverage provided by insurance policies. It is important to bear this in mind in the event that employees are required to travel to China.

4. GENERAL PREVENTIVE HYGIENE MEASURES FOR INDIVIDUAL PROTECTION AGAINST RESPIRATORY DISEASES (Ministry of Health)

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after you have had direct contact with, or have been near, people who are ill.
- Avoid close contact with people who are showing signs of a respiratory infection, such as coughing and sneezing.
- Stay approximately two metres away from people who are showing symptoms of an acute respiratory infection.
- If you need to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue, or cough/sneeze into the crook of your elbow. Then wash your hands immediately.
- Avoid sharing food, utensils (e.g. cutlery, cups, serviettes and napkins) and other items without first cleaning them thoroughly.
- It is not necessary to take any special precautions in relation to animals or food to prevent coronavirus infection.

If you have any queries, call the Salut Respon advice line on 061 or visit the Canal Salut website: canalsalut.gencat.cat.

For any other business-related queries, please write to info.accio@gencat.cat.