

COVID-19 Coronavirus update

20 March 2020



To help inform the community about COVID-19 Coronavirus, we have placed personal health advisory signs in council buildings where people may come into contact with each other.

This includes our service centres, visitor information centres, recreation centres and libraries.

We also have visual prompts to help remind patrons about social distancing.

To help minimise the risk to our community and our people, we have altered some of our programs, which is covered in this newsletter.

In this update you will also find general information about the virus and how to reduce your RISK.

We have the health and wellbeing of our customers and staff at the core of any decisions we make to change service levels or temporarily suspend close services, as guided by the Department of Health and Human Services and national guidelines.

During this time, we also encourage everyone to consider conducting council transactions online or by telephone instead of visiting our centres. You can make payments and complete a number of forms on our website.

Changes to council services

We have suspended the following services:

- The Lakes Entrance Aquadome was closed on Tuesday 17 March as a precautionary measure.

The Aquadome will **reopen** tomorrow, Saturday 21 March. There will be no group swim school or fitness classes.

- At the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre (BARC), swim school and group fitness classes are suspended.
- Forge Theatre is closed until at least late April.

We understand people may have already paid for these services, and have made the following arrangements:

Lakes Entrance Aquadome: memberships will be suspended for the duration of the closure.

BARC: swim school – if you have paid upfront you will receive a credit to use for future enrolments, if you are on a direct debit, it will be suspended.

Group fitness – go to our website's Find a Form page or visit reception to fill in a membership suspension form.

Forge Theatre: ticketholders can contact the box office on 5152 1482 for refunds or credit transfers to future performances.

We have also:

- Altered library programs to encourage appropriate space.
- Altered our small group training program and meetings.

Public toilets:

The coronavirus has put an unnecessary focus on toilet paper. This has unfortunately led to thefts from council's public toilets.

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A large amount of toilet paper has been stolen from the approximate 100 public toilets council manages across East Gippsland.

These facilities are made available for all community members and visitors - across East Gippsland. The dispensers have also been damaged in some cases by people accessing the toilet paper.

Council has been proactive in ordering stock to replenish our public toilets, however there is no guarantee of supply.

Please be advised that while council is doing its utmost to stock all facilities, there may come a time where there is no paper available.

Raymond Island Ferry

Council will temporarily suspend casual fees for all vehicles using the Raymond Island Ferry, effective from today, Friday 20 March.

We have made this decision following best practice guidelines to support social distancing for our passengers and ferry operator.

There is no change to the ferry schedule.

Pedestrians using the ferry are also reminded to please follow the social distancing practices recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services.

We investigated implementing other methods of fee collection, however this would incur a greater cost than the casual fees would offset. We will continue to review this arrangement as more information becomes available about the Coronavirus.

Events

Many council events, council-supported events and other community events and activities have been postponed or cancelled.

We appreciate the decisions made by the organisers of these events have not been easy and ask the community to respect the decisions of the organisers.

For information on council services, please call 5153 9500 or visit our website.

How is COVID-19 spread?

It is spread through close contact with an infected person. Keeping a distance of 1.5 metres from other people is recommended.

Close contact means greater than 15 minutes face-to-face or the sharing of a closed space for more than two hours with a confirmed case.

A close contact could include any person meeting any of the following criteria:

- Living in the same household or household-like setting (for example, a boarding school or hostel)
- Direct contact with the body fluids or laboratory specimens of a confirmed case
- A person who spent two hours or longer in the same room
- Face-to-face contact for more than 15 minutes with the case in any other setting not listed above.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Many people who contract COVID-19 will suffer only mild symptoms. However early indications are that the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions are more at risk of experiencing severe symptoms.

The most common coronavirus symptoms reported include:

- Fever
- Breathing difficulties such as breathlessness
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue or tiredness

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If you feel unwell

You need to call ahead **before** visiting your doctor or emergency department. This allows the medical centre to put infection control measures in place.

The Department of Health and Human Services also has a self-assessment chart to help you decide if you should be tested.

New measures to address the COVID-19 outbreak

On Wednesday 18 March the Prime Minister announced the following measures are now in place:

- Any international travel is discouraged and Australians overseas should return as soon as possible
- Domestic air travel is considered low risk. The National Cabinet to consider social distancing arrangements for domestic transport at its next meeting on Friday 20 March 2020.
- Non-essential indoor gatherings of 100 people or more (including staff) are banned, effective from today.
- The 100+ ban does not apply to essential activities such as public transport facilities, medical and health care facilities, pharmacies, emergency service facilities, correctional facilities, food markets, supermarkets
- Guidance and rules for non-essential indoor gatherings of fewer than 100 people (eg. cinemas and restaurants) are under consideration
- Outdoor events of fewer than 500 attendees may proceed subject to adoption of certain measures
- Anzac Day ceremonies, events and marches should be cancelled
- Schools are to remain open

- Aged care facilities should implement a range of specified measures for restricting visits and visitors
- Stop hoarding supplies – this is leading to pressure on supply chains
- 80,000 tests have been completed on Australians with 454 cases
- Low level community transmission but need to practice social distancing

More information on COVID-19

Visit the Department of Health and Human Services website for the latest advice and updates on the response to COVID-19:

www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus or call the dedicated hotline on 1800 675 398.