

Covid-19: Everything you need to know about social distancing

March 17, 2020



Photo: Getty Images

For those of us not in self-isolation, social distancing is one of the ways we can stop the spread of Covid-19. This is how to do it.

The Spinoff's coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak is funded by Spinoff Members. To support this work, [join Spinoff Members here](#).

Why do I need to be distant from others?

Social distancing is meant to slow the spread of diseases like Covid-19. It works by preventing the virus from moving between people via sneeze or cough. For those of us who don't need to be in self-isolation, one way we can [stop the virus spreading](#) is by keeping at a safe distance from others. There has been no [community transmission](#) of Covid-19 in New Zealand yet, and social distancing is the best way we can maintain this.

How distant do I need to be?

In yesterday's post-cabinet press conference, the prime minister defined social distancing as remaining outside of spitting distance of those around you. Social distancing is defined by the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as keeping a distance of six feet or two metres between you and another person, a measurement that was also referenced by Jacinda Ardern in an [interview with Q&A](#) on Sunday.

What if I'm not near sick people?

People with Covid-19 can look healthy. Some have mild cases, and others might not show symptoms at all. This doesn't mean you need to be more afraid; people who aren't sneezing or coughing are less likely to pass the virus on. Practise good hygiene and stay out of spitting distance, no matter how well someone looks.

Is social distance the same as physical distance?

Yes. Some are concerned that encouraging "social distance" could mislead people into isolating themselves socially and thereby fostering poor mental health. Social distance in this context is the same as physical distance, so there's no need to avoid talking to others on the phone, online, or even in person – just keep a small distance between you.

How easy is it to practise social distancing?

Some [businesses](#) are reorganising tables to ensure distance between customers. The Pop-Up Globe has [cut its capacity](#) to allow patrons room to spread out. The government has advised that all events of 500 or more attendees should be cancelled.

It's likely many businesses will take similar measures to facilitate social distancing in the next few weeks. Otherwise, make sure you are seated or standing away from others wherever you are. At the movies, you can leave a few seats between you and the next viewer. At the beach, put some space between your towels. No worries.

Will social distancing be practised in schools and universities?

It's unlikely that schools nationwide will be closed, but the Ministry of Health is currently assessing the capability of education providers to move online. In university residential colleges, students have been told [no visitors will be allowed](#). It's likely graduation ceremonies will not go ahead in April.

How do I practise social distancing on public transport?

It's difficult to stay a couple of metres away from fellow passengers on a rush-hour train. However, as people increasingly work from home this will become more feasible. You can also try to travel outside of peak hours. Remember to wash your hands thoroughly before and after travel, and try not to touch your face. To help with this, [Auckland Transport](#) has brought in hand sanitisers at key locations, and is cleaning trains and buses more frequently.

How do I practise social distancing in my flat?

If everyone you live with is using social distancing in their day-to-day activities, this decreases the chance of Covid-19 spreading within your flat. Having a ban on visitors to the flat for the time being might be a party-pooper, but it will help stop the spread. A gentle reminder that unless you're in isolation together, maybe go easy on the pashing for now.

Primary source: [Ministry of Health guidelines](#). Stay up to date with developments on our [live updates page](#).

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