

## Remote Area Travel restrictions

### Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

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#### **What are the remote area travel restrictions?**

On 20 March 2020, the National Cabinet provided in-principle agreement to the Commonwealth Minister for Health taking action under the Commonwealth Biosecurity Act 2015 to restrict travel into remote Indigenous communities to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

States and territories have nominated areas in consultation with Indigenous communities, and emergency requirements determined under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* will restrict persons from entering those nominated areas from 11:59pm AEDT Thursday 26 March 2020.

This follows the decisions of a number of Indigenous communities and Governments to implement similar measures.

#### **Why is this being done?**

These restrictions are to protect some of our most vulnerable Australians.

The restrictions have been requested by many leaders, communities and organisations.

Isolation and remoteness offer opportunities for delaying or potentially preventing an outbreak of COVID-19 in remote communities. However, high mobility of community members and a reliance on visiting and outreach activities and services increase the risk of COVID-19 occurring in these communities.

These rules are aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in remote communities and to rapidly address outbreaks.

#### **What is happening everywhere in Australia?**

Governments are focused on working together to slow the spread of COVID-19 to save lives. Every extra bit of time allows us to better prepare our health system and put measures in place to protect Australian lives.

We will be living with this virus for at least six months, so social distancing measures to slow this virus down must be sustainable for at least that long to protect Australian lives, allow Australia to keep functioning and keep Australians in jobs.

Practicing good hygiene and keeping a healthy physical distance between individuals is our most powerful weapon in fighting this virus and saving lives. Some members of the community who are disregarding social distancing measures are putting the lives of older and vulnerable Australians at risk.

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To slow the spread, everyone must implement appropriate social distancing in accordance with state and territory laws. We need every Australian to do their bit to save the lives of other Australians.

#### **When to they start and when do they end?**

Restrictions to travel to remote areas to protect community members from COVID-19 came into effect at **11.59 PM AEDT Thursday 26 March 2020**.

The restrictions currently end on 18 June 2020 under the Biosecurity Act. This period can be extended if considered necessary.

#### **What are the areas? (see attached [maps](#))**

States and Territories have nominated areas in consultation with Indigenous communities where this was possible in the time available.

The designated remote areas include most of the Northern Territory, except the major urban centres and pastoral properties; north and east Western Australia; the north-west of South Australia and selected communities; and in Queensland Cape York Peninsula, the Torres Strait, western Gulf and other communities.

More areas may be added, including in other States.

#### **How do the restrictions work? (see attached [flow chart](#))**

Consistent with expert health guidance, individuals will be required to undergo a minimum period of isolation (currently 14 days) before entry or re-entry into the area will be allowed.

There will be exemptions for essential activities. Exempted people still need to not have any of the signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and in the 14 days immediately before entry, not been outside Australia. All people must take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to other people.

#### **How do they affect community people in community?**

The safest place for community people is in their community, homeland or outstation.

If people are in community, they are encouraged to stay there. If they are away in town or the city, they should return home before Friday 27 March 2020.

#### **How do they affect community people outside of the areas?**

If people want to enter community after the restrictions come into place, they will need to self-isolate for 14 days before return. Isolation is from the general public.

State and Territory Governments are making arrangements to assist isolation.

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If people leave their community now, they will not be able to return for 14 days once the restrictions start at 11.59 PM AEDT on Thursday 26 March 2020.

#### **How will services still being provided?**

Once the restrictions start, only essential service personnel will be exempt so they can keep delivering essential services.

These essential services include health care, education, domestic violence prevention, child protection, policing, emergency, local government - such as rubbish collection, Services Australia, correctional, funerary and courts.

Essential services also include operating, maintaining or repairing equipment for providing electricity, gas, water or telecommunications services; other essential infrastructure; delivering food, fuel, mail or medical supplies; obtaining medical care or medical supplies; and transporting freight to or from a place in the designated area.

Remember, all people entering designated remote areas still need to not have any of the signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and in the 14 days immediately before entry, not been outside Australia. All people must take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to other people.

Governments and community organisations are working hard to ensure essential services continue in these communities.

#### **Can I travel between my homeland and community?**

Designated areas are generally large and include groups of communities and homelands/outstations. Travel within the designated area (including between islands within that area) is permitted and will not be disrupted with these restrictions. However, it is important that everyone tries to minimise travel and practises social distancing.

Local regulations and norms still apply for travel within those areas.

#### **What about other essential services or activities?**

Under the emergency requirements have nominated decision-makers who will be empowered to permit additional people to enter the community in certain circumstances with the advice of a Human Biosecurity expert.

Remember, all people entering designated remote areas, including for the provision of essential services, still need to not have any of the signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and in the 14 days immediately before entry, not been outside Australia. All people must take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to other people.

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#### **What about construction activities?**

Some construction of houses and roads is underway. These activities will be able to continue to completion as an essential activity.

#### **Does this effect pastoralists and miners?**

With most of the Northern Territory nominated as a designated area, all pastoral leases in the Northern Territory are excluded.

Mining, oil and gas and related operations are classed as an essential activity. However, there is an additional requirement to strictly minimise the extent to which other persons in the area are exposed to the persons carrying out those operations through agreed protocols with a relevant biosecurity officer.

All people entering designated remote areas, including for the provision of any of those services, will still need to not have any of the signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and in the 14 days immediately before entry, not been outside Australia. All people must take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to other people.

#### **Can I go to town for shopping (outside the designated area) and return to community (inside the designated area)? What if I have to travel to town for my job?**

No. You cannot leave a designated area and return without undergoing a minimum 14 day self-isolation.

All efforts are being made by governments to ensure community stores are stocked to provide for community residents.

If you have a job outside a designated area, you won't be able to return without undergoing a minimum 14 day self-isolation.

#### **Can nurses and teachers leave community to go to town for the weekend and then return to community?**

Health care and education are essential activities. All people entering designated remote areas need to not have any of the signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and in the 14 days immediately before entry, not been outside Australia. All people must take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to other people.

Local jurisdictions may put in place procedures to minimise essential workers moving in and out communities on a regular basis. This may apply especially to essential workers who are usually resident in community.

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#### **How do the Commonwealth remote travel restrictions interact with state and territory restrictions and policies?**

The Biosecurity Act remote travel restrictions set a strong standard to protect vulnerable remote communities.

States and territories and individual communities may impose tighter restrictions and some already have.

#### **What can I do to prevent the spread?**

Even with reduced movement between areas and communities, it is still important to take other steps to help stop the spread of coronavirus between people.

- Keep your hands clean and, when possible, wash them regularly with soap and water.
- Stay at least 1.5 meters – that’s two big steps – away from other people.
- Cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow or a tissue, throw the tissue away and don’t share items like water bottles and cigarettes.

#### **Who can I talk to for more information?**

Implementation of these restrictions will be the responsibility of each jurisdiction. Hotlines and contact details for your State or Territory Governments are below.

#### **More information and resources**

- [www.niaa.gov.au](http://www.niaa.gov.au)
- [www.indigenous.gov.au](http://www.indigenous.gov.au)
- [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

#### **State and Territory Hotlines and Contact Details**

Northern Territory: 1800 518 189 remote travel hotline

Western Australia: [Covid19rcr@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:Covid19rcr@communities.wa.gov.au)

Queensland: 13 QGOV (13 7468)

South Australia: 1800 253 787