

Taking the panic out of pandemic

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Credit: Unsplash

In the wake of Australia's first coronavirus-related death on Sunday, the nation now has just a small window of opportunity to avoid hitting the panic button.

That's the expert view of disaster response researcher Associate

Professor Erin Smith of Edith Cowan University, who is calling for calm as the world edges closer to pandemic status.

"While this is scary, it's important to remember that the virus is only causing clinically serious illness in around five percent of those it has infected, and the 1-2 percent of people who have died from [coronavirus](#) have generally been the elderly with co-morbid illnesses," Professor Smith said.

"We have a unique window of opportunity at the moment to educate the public in order for them to remain alert and aware, but not alarmed."

Infodemic of misinformation

With supplies of face masks running out around the globe and an infodemic of misinformation spreading in parallel to the disease, Professor Smith said it was time to give the public practical things to do so they felt more in control of their personal preparedness.

Her recommendations include:

- **Sensible shopping.** While stockpiling certain items—such as medical prescriptions, non-perishable food items and bottled water—is sensible, a two-week supply of these items is sufficient for the time being. We don't need the community rushing out to bulk-buy at Costco.
- **Hand washing.** People should get in the practice of routinely washing their hands with soap and water and have a back-up hand sanitiser for when hand-washing is not practical. But remember that hand sanitisers are not as effective for killing bugs like the coronavirus as manual handwashing with soap and water.
- **Modify some behaviours.** We also need to stop touching our

face—which people do up to 24 times an hour—as this can also prevent diseases like coronavirus that are spread by droplets and love lurking on our hands and then entering our bodies through our eyes, nose and mouth.

- Get the right information. Reputable sources like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide up-to-date and reliable information on the virus and help to debunk some of the common myths that are circulating about coronavirus—like rubbing sesame oil over your body, gargling salt water or eating garlic. None of these things will protect you from the virus—but washing your hands and not touching your face will.

Talk to your families

Professor Smith said it was important for Australian families to start having measured discussions around how to best prepare for a pandemic.

"It is wise to think ahead about potential scenarios, such as what to do if a parent or child became sick in the family," she said.

"People need to think through how they would cope if kindergartens, child care centres and schools are closed down to prevent community transmission of the disease.

"If one or both of the parents is a first responder or health professional, they may be a higher risk of becoming infected through their contact with coronavirus patients, and that's also a discussion worth having."

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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