

## **INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 - UPDATE MARCH 12, 2020**

### **CORVID-19 SYMPTOMS:**

Information taken from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as posted on the Government of Canada website [www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca)

Those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms. You may not know you have symptoms of COVID-19 because they are similar to a cold or flu.

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. This is the longest known infectious period for this disease. We are currently investigating if the virus can be transmitted to others if someone is not showing symptoms. While experts believe that it is possible, it is considered to be rare.

### **Symptoms have included:**

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- pneumonia in both lungs
- In severe cases, infection can lead to death.

### **IF YOU BECOME ILL**

If you are ill and must visit a health care professional, call ahead or tell them when you arrive that you have a respiratory illness. You may be asked to wear a mask while waiting for or receiving treatment to prevent the spread of the illness.

If you have travelled abroad and you develop fever, cough or difficulty breathing in the next 14 days: **isolate yourself within the home** as quickly as possible **and** call your health care provider or public health authority

Tell them your symptoms and travel history. Let them know whether you have had direct contact with animals or a sick person, especially if they have had symptoms.

### **BEING PREPARED**

It is important to know how you can prepare in case you or a family member become ill.

Although China remains the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak, more countries are reporting cases. Some countries may not have the capacity to detect or contain the disease. This means global efforts to stop the spread of the disease may not be enough to prevent a pandemic (global outbreak).

At this time, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has assessed the public health risk associated with COVID-19 as **low** for the general population in Canada but this could change rapidly. There is an increased risk of more severe outcomes for Canadians:

- aged 65 and over
- with compromised immune systems
- with underlying medical conditions

While a COVID-19 outbreak is not unexpected in Canada, our public health system is prepared to respond. PHAC, along with provincial, territorial and community partners, continues to reassess the public health risk, based on the best available evidence as the situation evolves.

In order to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, **everyone has a role to play**. It takes more than governments and action from the health sector to protect the health and safety of Canadians. Each of us can help our country be prepared in the event of an emergency by understanding how coronavirus spreads and how to prevent illness.

## **FOR INDIVIDUALS**

Canadians should continue to think ahead about the actions that they can take to stay healthy and prevent the spread of any illness, especially respiratory infections.

Now and always during cold and flu season, **stay home if you are sick**. Encourage those you know are sick to stay home until they no longer have symptoms.

Since respiratory viruses, such as the one that causes COVID-19, are spread through contact, change how you greet one another. Instead of a handshake, a kiss or a hug, a friendly wave or elbow bump is less likely to expose you to respiratory viruses.

Practise frequent hand hygiene and coughing and sneezing etiquette. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, such as toys and door handles.

These are the most important ways that you can protect yourself and your family from respiratory illness, including COVID-19.

## **MAKE A PLAN**

If COVID-19 becomes common in your community, you will want to have thought about how to change your behaviours and routines to reduce the risk of infection.

Your plan should include how you can change your regular habits to reduce your exposure to crowded places. For example, you may:

- do your grocery shopping at off-peak hours
- commute by public transit outside of the busy rush hour
- opt to exercise outdoors instead of in an indoor fitness class

Your plan should also include what you will do if you become sick. If you are a caregiver of children or other dependents, you will want to have thought ahead to engage backup caregivers.

You should also think about what you will do if a member of your family becomes sick and needs care. Talk to your employer about working from home if you are needed to care for a family member at home.

If you, yourself, become ill, stay home until you are no longer showing symptoms. Employers should not require a sick leave note as that will put added pressure on limited health care services.

Your plan should include shopping for supplies that you should have on hand at all times. This will ensure you do not need to leave your home while you are sick or busy caring for an ill family member.

Your plan should build on the kits you have prepared for other potential emergencies. For more information on how to prepare yourself and your family in the event of an emergency, please visit [GetPrepared.ca](https://www.getprepared.ca).

## **FILL YOUR PRESCRIPTIONS**

Refill your prescriptions now so that you do not have to go to a busy pharmacy if you do become sick. Consider seeing your health care provider to renew your prescriptions ahead of time.

## **STOCK UP ON ESSENTIAL BUT AVOID PANIC BUYING**

At this time, it makes sense to fill your cupboards with non-perishable food items, so that you do not need to go shopping if you become sick.

It is easier on the supply chain if people gradually build up their household stores instead of making large-scale purchases all at once. To do this, you can add a few extra items to your grocery cart every time you shop. Good options are easy-to-prepare foods like:

- dried pasta and sauce
- prepared canned soups
- canned vegetables and beans

It is also a good idea to have extra stores of:

- pet food
- toilet paper
- facial tissue
- feminine hygiene products
- diapers (if you have children who use them)

The reason for stocking up on these items is not necessarily because you will need to self-isolate. Having these supplies on hand will ensure you do not need to leave your home at the peak of the outbreak or if you become ill.

## **HOW TO CARE FOR THOSE WHO ARE ILL**

If you or a member of your family become ill with COVID-19, there are precautions that should be taken in the home. Your health care provider will advise you if hospital care is more appropriate.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/how-to-care-for-person-with-covid-19-at-home-advice-for-caregivers.html>

## **To prepare for this potential situation, you should have on hand:**

- soap
- facial tissue
- paper towels
- alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- household cleaning products
- regular detergents for washing dishes and doing laundry
- fever-reducing medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
  - this includes products for children if you are a parent or caregiver
- plastic garbage bags for containing soiled tissues and other waste
- household bleach for creating a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water to disinfect surfaces

## **GET RELIABLE INFORMATION**

Make sure that you get high-quality information about COVID-19 from reliable sources. The Public Health Agency of Canada is a reliable source of information, as are provincial and territorial public health authorities.

If you are finding that the news media is making you feel anxious, take a break from it.

## **Communicate with family, friends and neighbours**

Let your family, friends and neighbours know that you are making plans to prepare for COVID-19. Share your plan with them, as this might motivate them to make their own.

Talk to them about a buddy system in which you agree to check in on each other and run essential errands if you become sick.

## **For Communities**

Social distancing measures are a way to minimize COVID-19 transmission in the community. This means minimizing close contact with others during the peak of an outbreak. In addition to **staying home when ill**, we should plan for actions we can take if we need to reduce the spread of infection in places where we gather.

Some of the social distancing measures need extensive preparation, especially where large crowds are concerned. Community planners should prepare for:

- interruptions in social supports
- reduction in public services like transit and access to community centres
- financial consequences from the reduction of services or cancelled events

Planners, administrators and employers must work together to put into effect community-based measures that will protect:

- groups
- employees
- the general population

## **Avoiding Crowds**

Respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 spread quickly in crowded spaces. Avoiding crowds can reduce the spread of infection. This type of precaution could have a significant impact on how a community functions.

Communities should plan ahead and consider:

- whether to shut down public transit
  - if public transit is shut down, ensure transportation remains available for:
    - critical infrastructure workers
    - emergency medical services or treatments like dialysis and chemotherapy
- working with employers and businesses to put into effect staggered work hours
  - this reduces crowding on public transit during peak commuting hours and in large workplaces during normal workday hours
- voluntary quarantine of a community based on a risk assessment
- whether to ask individuals, organizations and businesses to cancel or postpone mass gatherings, such as:
  - funerals
  - weddings
  - religious services
  - concerts, conferences, sporting events and other forms of entertainment
- requiring people to stay home from school, work or other community settings, such as shopping centres and movie theatres

## **Mass Gatherings**

Mass gatherings can have the potential for serious public health consequences if they are not planned and managed carefully. They can increase the spread of infectious diseases and cause additional strain on the health care system when held during outbreaks.

Infections can also be transmitted during transit to and from an event, and in participants' home communities upon return.

Event planners need to consider the COVID-19 outbreak in their event planning. They should consult with all relevant agencies, including public health authorities.

Aside from cancelling or postponing an event, other measures to reduce infection risks during mass gatherings include:

- avoiding shaking hands
- practising proper hygiene
- avoiding common sleeping areas
- discouraging attendees from sharing food or drinks
- increasing social distance between others (ideally to 2 metres) by:
  - broadcasting events
  - offering virtual participation
  - moving the venue from indoors to outdoors
- eliminating self-serve buffet style eating at social or religious gatherings
- encouraging ill people or those with high-risk medical conditions not to attend gatherings
- supporting hand hygiene by providing hand sanitizers dispensers in prominent locations
- ensuring event organizers have arrangements in place to safely isolate and transport people who become ill onsite
- communicating clearly to attendees about the risks and directing them to our advice on reducing the spread of illness

For more information, refer to our COVID-19 guidance on risk-informed decision making for mass gatherings. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>

#### Remote and isolated communities

Communities that are remote or isolated should consider stocking up on needed supplies like food and medicine. The supply chain may be interrupted or become unreliable.

Additional challenges should be taken into account. For example, some remote communities may have limited access to clean running water for frequent hand hygiene.

#### **For schools and daycares** *(included for our employees with children)*

School and daycare measures can range from simple (like increasing distancing between desks) to more extensive (like closures).

Widespread school closures as a control measure tend to have a high economic and social cost. This is because school closures impact the many families that have one or both parents working outside of the home.

Public health measures for schools and daycare are intended to provide a safer school environment by encouraging:

- personal protective measures
- communication to teachers and parents
- regularly cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces and objects like door handles, toilets and toys

The following measures are alternatives to school or day care closures.

- Restrict access to common areas.
- Divide classes into smaller groups.
- Cancel or postpone after-school events.
- Increase desk distance between students.
- Be flexible with attendance policies for students and staff.
  - Students and staff who show symptoms of COVID-19 should **stay at home**.

- Separate children on school busses by 2 metres where possible.
- Cancel classes that bring students together from multiple classrooms.
- Stagger the school schedule (lunch breaks and recess) to limit the number of students and children in attendance at one time.

For more information on guidance for schools and day cares, refer to Public Health Guidance for Schools (K-12) and Childcare Programs (COVID-19). <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html>

### **For workplaces**

Employers and employees have a role to play in reducing the spread of infection.

Further information on preparing workplaces for COVID-19 (PDF) is available from the World Health Organization. (Copy posted in the office)

### **General Advice**

- Increase awareness about COVID-19 through communication with staff.
- Evaluate the workplace for areas where people have frequent contact with each other and shared objects.
- Increase the distance between desks and workstations as well as employees and customers (ideally **2 metres**).
  - A physical barrier like a cubicle or Plexiglas window also works to increase distance between people.

### **Hygiene**

- Encourage frequent hand hygiene, sneeze and cough etiquette, and **staying home when ill**.
  - Consider providing additional tissues should someone develop symptoms of COVID-19.
  - If COVID-19 symptoms develop, the employee should immediately be separated from others and sent home without using public transit, if possible.
- Ensure frequent cleaning, with particular attention to high-touch surfaces, such as:
  - bars
  - desks
  - phones
  - kitchens
  - computers
  - cash registers
  - elevator buttons
  - restaurant tables and menus
- Provide access to handwashing areas and place hand sanitizing dispensers in prominent locations throughout the workplace, if possible.

### **Flexible work arrangements and sick leave**

- Where feasible, adjust policies to reduce social contact, such as:
  - flexible hours
  - staggering start times
  - teleworking arrangements
  - using email and teleconferencing
- Relax sick leave policies to support employees in self-isolating when ill.
  - This includes suspending the need for medical notes and reduces the burden on an already stressed health care system.

- Prepare for increases in absenteeism due to illness among employees and their families or possibly school closures.
  - Access your business continuity plan for how to maintain key business functions if faced with high absenteeism.
  - Consider the need for cross-training personnel to function in key positions.

## **Closure**

Workplace closures may be considered in an exceptional circumstance and should be based on a risk assessment. This may be the case if many employees must be off to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## **Diagnosing coronavirus**

Coronavirus infections are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and are confirmed through laboratory tests.

## **Treating coronavirus**

At this time, there is no vaccine for COVID-19 or any natural health products that are authorized to treat or protect against COVID-19.

Most people with mild coronavirus illness will recover on their own. Your health care provider may recommend steps you can take to relieve symptoms.

## **Consult your health care provider as soon as possible if:**

- you are concerned about your symptoms **or**
- you have a travel history to a region where severe coronaviruses are known to occur

The sooner you consult your health care provider, the better your chances are for recovery.

Flu vaccine will not protect you

While coronaviruses are a respiratory illness, these infections are not the same as those that cause the flu. If you have received a flu vaccine, it will **not** protect against coronaviruses.

## **About coronaviruses**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people and others cause illness in animals. Human coronaviruses are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold.

COVID-19 is a new disease that has not been previously identified in humans. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people, and more rarely, these can then spread from person to person through close contact.

There have been 2 other specific coronaviruses that have spread from animals to humans and which have caused severe illness in humans. These are the:

- [severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus \(SARS CoV\)](#)
- [Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus \(MERS CoV\)](#)