March 16, 2020



**General Information on COVID-19**

**(modified from Government of Canada website)**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html#faq>

**Symptoms of COVID-19**

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.

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 feel sick during travel to Canada or upon arrival, inform the flight attendant, cruise staff or a Canadian border services officer. They will decide whether you need further medical assessment by a quarantine officer.

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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet-travelled-hubei-province-china.html#au)

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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html) in case you or a family member become ill.

**Diagnosing coronavirus**

Coronavirus infections are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and are confirmed through laboratory tests. For patients showing up at their doctors office or local health clinic, a nasopharyngeal swab will be taken at the back of the throat, administered through the nose. It is nor as simple as a throat swab for strep throat. These tests are very sensitive and can pick up the smallest traces of the virus. Currently people who qualify to be tested in general are people who have a fever or cough or difficulty breathing and who 14 days prior to the onset of the illness either travelled to an impacted area or had close contact with someone who may have COVID-19, or had close contact with a person with an acute respiratory illness who has been to an impacted area. (from Public Health Ontario)

**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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html#ath) 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.

**If you become ill**

If you feel sick during travel to Canada or upon arrival, inform the flight attendant, cruise staff or a Canadian border services officer. They will decide whether you need further medical assessment by a quarantine officer.

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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet-travelled-hubei-province-china.html#au)

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.

**About coronaviruses**

[Coronaviruses](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html) 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:

1. [severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS CoV)](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/diseases-conditions/sars-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome.html)
2. [Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS CoV)](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-mers.html)

## How coronavirus spreads

Human coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person through:

* respiratory droplets generated when you cough or sneeze
* close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
* touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

Current evidence suggests person-to-person spread is efficient when there is close contact.

## Preventing coronavirus

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

### If you have travelled to an at-risk area

If [you have travelled to Hubei province, China, Iran or Italy](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet-travelled-hubei-province-china.html) or any other affected country or area in the last 14 days, limit your contact with others for 14 days, starting the day you began your journey to Canada. This means self-isolate and **stay at home**. Contact the [public health authority in your province or territory](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet.html#pha) within 24 hours of arriving in Canada for advice.

### If you have COVID-19, reduce contact with others

If you are sick, the following steps will help to reduce contact with others:

* stay at home and [self-isolate](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-how-to-isolate-at-home.html) (unless directed to seek medical care)
  + if you must leave your home, [wear a mask](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#wm) or cover your mouth and nose with tissues, and maintain a **2-metre distance** from others
* avoid individuals in hospitals and long-term care centres, especially [older adults and those with chronic conditions or compromised immune systems](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/vulnerable-populations-covid-19.html)
* avoid having visitors to your home
* cover your mouth and nose with your arm when coughing and sneezing
* have supplies delivered to your home instead of running errands
  + supplies should be dropped off outside to ensure a 2-metre distance

### Self-isolate vs. self-monitor

There is a difference between advice to self-isolate and advice to self-monitor.

You should self-isolate if:

* you have been diagnosed with COVID-19
* local public health has identified you as a close contact of someone diagnosed with COVID-19

If you have not been diagnosed with COVID-19 or identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19, you may be asked to self-monitor.

This means:

* monitor yourself for symptoms of respiratory illness such as fever, cough, difficulty breathing

If symptoms develop:

* stay home
* limit contact with others
* contact local public health, and follow their instructions

### Hygiene

Proper hygiene can help reduce the risk of infection or spreading infection to others:

* wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the washroom and when preparing food
  + use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
* when coughing or sneezing:
  + cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm, not your hand
  + dispose of any tissues you have used as soon as possible in a lined waste basket and wash your hands afterwards
* avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
* clean the following high-touch surfaces frequently with regular household cleaners or diluted bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water):
  + toys
  + toilets
  + phones
  + electronics
  + door handles
  + bedside tables
  + television remotes

### Wearing masks

If you are a healthy individual, the use of a mask is not recommended for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Wearing a mask when you are not ill may give a false sense of security. There is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use and disposal. They also need to be changed frequently.

However, your health care provider may recommend you wear a mask if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 while you are seeking or waiting for care. In this instance, masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures. The mask acts as a barrier and helps stop the tiny droplets from spreading you when you cough or sneeze.

## Risks of getting coronavirus

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

The risk to Canadian travellers abroad will vary depending on the destination, as well as the person’s age and health status. There are some destinations where the Government of Canada recommends avoiding all travel or all non-essential travel. Check the latest [travel health notices](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices) often before travelling.

As well, the risk for COVID-19 may be increased for certain settings such as:

* [cruise ships](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html#cruise)
* heavily affected areas
* international conferences and other large gatherings in enclosed spaces

It is important for all travellers to:

* self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough or difficulty breathing) for 14 days after returning to Canada
* avoid places where you cannot easily separate yourself from others if you become ill

If you have even mild symptoms, **stay home** and call the [public health authority](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet.html#pha) in the province or territory you are in to inform them. They will provide advice on what you should do.

We will continue to adapt our risk assessment based on the latest data available.

### Products shipped from China

Coronaviruses generally do not survive on surfaces after being contaminated. The risk of spread from products shipped over a period of days or weeks at room temperature is **very low**.

There is no known risk of coronaviruses entering Canada on parcels or packages coming from affected regions in China.

### Animals in Canada

There is currently no evidence to suggest that this virus is circulating in animals in Canada.

It is possible that some types of animals can be infected with COVID-19 but there is no evidence that pets or other animals can spread the virus. There are still many unknowns about COVID-19 and this is an area that remains to be studied and understood.

Until we know more, if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have a pet or other animal:

* avoid close contact with them
  + do not snuggle or kiss them, or let them lick you, sit on your lap, or sleep in your bed
* practise good cough etiquette
  + avoid coughing and sneezing on your animals
* have another member of your household care for your animals
  + if this is not possible, always wash your hands before touching or feeding them
* limit your animal's contact with other people and animals
  + this may mean keeping them indoors

To date, there have not been any reports of livestock being infected by COVID-19 anywhere. However, livestock producers should follow normal biosecurity measures as always. This includes limiting visitors or workers who may have travelled to, or been in contact with, someone from an affected area. For more information on-farm disease prevention, producers are encouraged to consult the:

* [National Biosecurity Standards and Biosecurity Principles](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/biosecurity/standards-and-principles/eng/1344707905203/1344707981478)
* [National Farm-Level Biosecurity Planning Guide](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/biosecurity/standards-and-principles/proactive-management/eng/1374175296768/1374176128059?chap=0).

These recommendations will be updated as more information becomes available.

### Animals in or from other countries

Although the current spread and growth of the COVID-19 outbreak is primarily associated with spread from person to person, experts agree that the virus likely originated from bats and may have passed through an intermediary animal source (currently unknown) in China before being transmitted to humans.

It is recommended that individuals who travel to an affected country or region avoid contact with animals, including wild meat and wet (live animal) markets.

If you are considering travel, check the latest travel health notices for the most up-to-date travel advice prior to travelling.

All animals entering Canada must meet [import requirements](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/imports/import-policies/live-animals/pet-imports/eng/1326600389775/1326600500578) set out by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. There are currently no specific requirements in place in Canada restricting animal importation related to the COVID-19 outbreak. This is because as there is no evidence that pets or other domestic animals can spread the virus.

However, until we know more, importers, rescue organizations and adoptive families should consider limiting or postponing importing animals from affected areas. If animals are imported from an affected area:

* they should be closely monitored for signs of illness
* you should contact a veterinarian if they become sick
  + call ahead to ensure they are aware of the circumstances

**Being prepared**

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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#h) and [how to prevent illness](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#p).

**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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/healthy-living/hand-hygiene.html) and [coughing and sneezing etiquette](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#p). 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. Fill your prescriptions. Stock up on essentials but avoid panic buying.

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](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/public-health-measures-mitigate-covid-19.html). 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