

# novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for Public

Issued by the AHS Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC)

## What's happening in Alberta?

Latest info for travellers, visit: [ahs.ca/covid](https://ahs.ca/covid)

## **NEW** Should I change or cancel my travel plans outside of Canada?

- Travel outside Canada is **not recommended** at this time.
- Given the rapid global spread of COVID-19, it is no longer possible to assess health risks for the duration of the trip.
  - Public Health Agency of Canada's Travel Health Advisories: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices>.
  - World Health Organization's bulletins: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice>.

## **NEW** What should I do if I have recently returned from travelling outside of Canada?

- Effective March 12, all Albertans currently outside of the country, or who have recently returned, are recommended to self-isolate on their return for 14 days, independent of the country they were visiting.

You can do this by following these guidelines (<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/health-self-isolation-information-sheet.pdf>), which include:

- Avoid close contact with other people, especially those with chronic conditions, a compromised immune system, or seniors.
- Do not attend work, school, social events or any other public gatherings.
- Watch for symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath in yourself or family members.
- Call Health Link 811 at the first sign of symptoms. Call from home before going to a health care facility, unless severely ill.
- If severely ill and in need of immediate medical attention call 911 and inform them that you may have COVID-19.

If you are unsure if you should be self-isolating, or if you have questions about how to do it, follow these guidelines or call Health Link 811.

## **NEW** I have a large event planned/I am planning to attend a large event, what should I do?

- To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alberta has implemented new public health restrictions as of March 12. The following mass gatherings should be **cancelled**:
  - Events with more than 50 attendees that involves international participants, critical infrastructure staff, seniors, or other high-risk populations.
  - Large events with more than 250 attendees:
    - Includes: sporting events, conferences and community events
    - Does not include: places of worship, grocery stores, airports or shopping centres

- Events that do not meet this criteria can proceed, but risk mitigation measures must be in place, such as providing sanitizer stations and distancing between attendees.

**Schools, daycares and post-secondary institutions can remain open at this time**, but steps should be taken to ensure no more than 250 people are in the same room at any given time.

### **UPDATED I was on a flight where there was someone who looked sick. Am I at risk?**

- Influenza and the common cold are far more likely causes of respiratory illness among travellers.
- You can protect yourself by washing your hands often and well, and getting your annual influenza vaccine.
- Returning travellers on international flights may be screened at the airport: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/canadas-reponse.html>
- If any cases are diagnosed among travellers to Alberta, Public Health will be following up with anyone who was exposed.

### **UPDATED How can I protect myself and my family from COVID-19?**

- To help protect against all respiratory illnesses, including the flu and COVID-19, you should:
  - Wash your hands often and well. Refer to hand-washing guidance here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/if-hp-ipc-flu-handwash-how-to.pdf>
  - Avoid touching your face, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick
  - Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched
  - Stay at home and away from others if you are feeling ill
  - When sick, cover your cough and sneezes and then wash your hands. Refer to respiratory etiquette guidance here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/if-hp-ipc-cover-cough.pdf>

### **UPDATED I am worried about catching COVID-19. Should I wear a medical mask?**

- Masks can be very important in certain situations. When sick, wearing a mask helps prevent us from passing illnesses on to other people. This is why we ask people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms to wear a mask and wash their hands when visiting an emergency department or clinic.
  - If you are sick, wearing a mask helps prevent passing the illness on to other people.
  - If you are healthy, medical masks are not recommended as they don't provide full protection and can create a false sense of security.
  - See [appropriate infection prevention and control precautions for health-care settings](#)
- Frequent and thorough hand washing, covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing and avoiding touching your face, nose or mouth remain the best evidence-based ways to prevent the spread of respiratory illness.
- N95 masks (respirator masks) require special fitting and testing in order to be effective. We strongly recommend against members of the public using N95 masks, as they can make it more difficult to breathe for some individuals, especially those with chronic breathing problems. They provide little, if any, benefit beyond that provided by a procedure mask.

## What is novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses.
- Some coronaviruses cause respiratory illness in people, ranging from common colds to severe pneumonias. Others cause illness in animals only.
- Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people, and more rarely, these can spread from person to person through close contact.
- Novel coronaviruses are new strains of the virus that have not been previously identified in humans.

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Symptoms for COVID-19 are similar to those for influenza or other respiratory illnesses. The most common symptoms include:
  - fever
  - cough
  - extreme tiredness
- Most people (about 80%) recover from this disease without needing special treatment.
- However, it can cause serious illness. Those who are older, and those with other medical problems are more likely to develop serious illness, which can include:
  - difficulty breathing
  - pneumonia
- There is a risk of death in severe cases.
- While we are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

## How is COVID-19 spread from person-to-person?

- COVID-19 is believed to be spread mainly by coughing, sneezing or direct contact with a sick person or with surfaces they have recently touched.

## Who should be assessed for COVID-19?

- People who develop a fever and/or cough or difficulty breathing should be assessed for COVID-19 if, within 14 days before symptoms began, **they meet any of the following criteria:** <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>.
- Anyone meeting these criteria should avoid contact with others and call Health Link 811 for advice.

## What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

- If you are sick and meet these criteria: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>
  - Stay home and call Health Link 811 for advice.

- If you are not seriously ill, **do not** go to a physician's office, a health care facility or a lab without consulting with Health Link first.
- Call 911 if you are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention and inform them that you may have COVID-19

## What does self-isolation mean?

- Self-isolation means avoiding situations where you could infect other people. This means all situations where you may come in contact with others, such as social gatherings, work, school, child care, athletic events, university, faith-based gatherings, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, shopping malls, and all public gatherings.
- You should, (where possible) not use public transportation including buses, taxis, or ride sharing.
- As much as possible, you should limit contact with people other than the family members/companions who you travelled with.
- You should avoid having visitors to your home, but it is okay for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food.
- You can also use delivery or pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.
- Avoid sharing household items such as dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, pillows, or other items with other people in your home. After using these items, you should wash them thoroughly with soap and water, place in the dishwasher for cleaning, or wash in the washing machine.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched and shared surfaces such as doorknobs and counters.
- If you need to leave your home for an urgent errand, such as picking up essential medication, as a precaution to reduce risk of spread, you should wear a surgical mask while you are out.
- During this time, it is important that you monitor your health for symptoms like fever or cough, and call Health Link 811 if you have any concerns.

## How is COVID-19 treated?

- Although there are no specific medications for COVID-19 at this time, the Alberta health care system is able to provide effective care for people who develop a serious COVID-19 illness.

## Are there vaccines to prevent COVID-19?

- Not yet. Much research is currently underway to develop a vaccine, but it could take some time before a vaccine is developed and approved for use in Canada.

## Who is most at risk for becoming very sick with COVID-19?

- Although most people who develop COVID-19 will experience mild illness, some individuals are more likely to become seriously ill. Older adults and people with medical conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease appear to be at higher risk of becoming very sick.

### **Is AHS prepared to meet the increased demands on health care in the event of a local outbreak of COVID-19?**

- In collaboration with Alberta Health and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Alberta Health Services prepares for a serious respiratory outbreak as part of our regular operations. We are ready to enact these plans to respond to COVID-19 in Alberta.
- The goals of our outbreak response are to control the spread of disease, reduce illness and death, minimize disruptions to the daily life of Albertans, minimize economic impacts and support an efficient and effective use of resources during response and recovery.
- Although influenza is the model infection used, Alberta's Pandemic Plan is also applicable to other respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You can read more about the plan on the Government of Alberta website at <https://www.alberta.ca/pandemic-influenza.aspx>

### **I am not having symptoms, but I'm concerned about COVID-19 and want to talk to someone. Should I call Health Link?**

- Please visit the following websites if you have further general questions about what COVID-19 is, how it is spread, or how many cases there are in the world at present. You can call Health Link 811 if you have additional questions about what you need to do to protect yourself and your family against getting a COVID-19 infection.
  - Alberta Health: [alberta.ca/covid19](https://alberta.ca/covid19)
  - Public Health Agency of Canada: [canada.ca](https://canada.ca)
  - World Health Organization: [who.int](https://who.int)