Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

Common Questions about COVID-19

Find answers to some of the most common questions about COVID-19. Learn how it spreads, how long after exposure symptoms take to appear and what symptoms to look for. Find out what you can do to prevent COVID-19.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a coronavirus. COVID-19 has spread worldwide, including to British Columbia, and has been declared a global pandemic.

Symptoms

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other respiratory illnesses including the flu and common cold. Common symptoms for COVID-19 include: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat and painful swallowing, stuffy or runny nose, loss of sense of smell, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and loss of appetite.

Symptoms may vary from person to person. Some people may experience mild symptoms, while others have more severe symptoms. If you have COVID-19, or think you might have it, help prevent spreading it to others by self-isolating for 10 days from the start of your symptoms. If you are sick, stay home.

To learn about COVID-19 symptoms, what to do if you are feeling ill, and who may be at higher risk for complications, see Symptoms of COVID-19.

Reduce your risk of infection

Coronavirus is spread from an infected person through:

- Respiratory droplets spread when a person coughs or sneezes
- Close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

It is important to keep about 2 metres away from a person who is sick, to reduce breathing in droplets if they cough or sneeze.

Wash hands and clean often:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Using soap and water is the single most effective way to reduce the spread of infection
- If a sink is not available, you can use alcohol based hand rubs (ABHR) to clean your hands as long as they are not visibly soiled. If they are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then ABHR to effectively clean them
- Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces

- Do not share food, drinks, utensils, etc.

For more information on proper hand washing see:

- [Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs (HealthLinkBC File #85)](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Reduce the spread of COVID-19: Wash your hands](#) (PDF 298KB)

General cleaning and disinfecting:

- Clean and disinfect your home regularly to prevent the spread of illness including COVID-19. Water and soap (e.g. liquid dishwashing soap) or common household cleaning wipes can be used to clean dirt, crumbs, oil or other debris on surfaces
- Clean surfaces that are touched often (e.g., counters, tables, doorknobs, toilets, sinks, taps, etc.) at least once a day
- Clean with soap or detergent before disinfecting
- If possible, use store bought disinfectants. If store bought disinfectants are not available, you can mix household bleach with room temperature water (do not use hot water) in specific ratios to disinfect areas in your home. Household bleach should be diluted
- Rinsing and drying recommendations are important parts of the disinfection process

For more information on cleaning and disinfecting, as well as a table describing how to prepare a disinfecting solution using bleach and water, see BC Centre for Disease Control: [Cleaning and disinfecting](#).

If you live in the same household with someone who has COVID-19 or has respiratory symptoms that started within 14 days of returning to Canada, you are at high risk of exposure and spreading the infection to others. Self-isolate at home for 14 days. If possible, stay in separate rooms, sleep in separate beds and use separate bathrooms.

Stopping the spread in your community

British Columbians are asked to stay home. The more you stay at home, the safer it will be for everyone in your community. It reduces the possibility of spreading COVID-19 to others.

Physical distancing from others is important. Staying away from others is the only way to keep people from getting the disease. No community is immune. COVID-19 can be spread by people who have minimal symptoms. Someone who seems healthy could spread it to parents, grandparents or other people in our community. Some of these people could get seriously ill from this virus. Stay home except for essential errands.

If you must be out in the community, follow these simple tips to help prevent the spread of COVID-19

- Wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Keep a physical distance of about 2 metres between yourself and others when you are out.
- Avoid handshakes (wave instead).
- Go to the grocery store only once a week, or less.

- Send one household member on errands to reduce the number of potential exposures.
- Exercise at home or in your neighbourhood.
- Do not have visitors.
- Wear a mask if you are sick with COVID-19 symptoms (especially coughing). If you are not sick, it may be less helpful to wear a mask.

To learn more about how you can protect yourself and others, see Physical Distancing at BC Centre for Disease Control.

Staying close to home helps reduce the chance of spread COVID-19. Self-isolation is mandatory after international travel. Learn more about travel within and outside of Canada at Travel and COVID-19.

Self-isolation and ending self-isolation

Self-isolation means staying home and avoiding situations where you could come in contact with others and is an important measure in stopping the spread of illness. Anyone with COVID-like symptoms should self-isolate for at least 10 days after symptoms start, and anyone who may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or has returned from international travel should self-isolate and self-monitor for 14 days.

To learn more about self-isolation, who should self-isolate and ending self-isolation, see Self-Isolation and COVID-19.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring means paying close attention to how you feel to see if you develop any COVID-like symptoms such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing. You may also need to help children or close contacts who are older or chronically ill and are self-monitoring.

To learn more about self-monitoring, see How to self-monitor at BC Centre for Disease Control.

Testing

Testing is recommended for anyone with cold, influenza or COVID-like symptoms, even mild symptoms.

You no longer need a referral from a health care provider and you do not need to call 8-1-1 if you have symptoms and would like to be tested for COVID-19. You can use the BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool to help determine if you need further assessment for COVID-19 testing by a physician, nurse practitioner or at a local collection centre.

Click on the links below for a list of collection centres (locations where you can be tested) across the province to find one near you or call **8-1-1** to find the nearest centre.

- Collection centre finder (Mobile and desktop)
- Collection centre finder (Internet Explorer)

People who are at higher risk will continue to be prioritized for testing. This includes health-care workers, essential services providers, and individuals who are vulnerable to complications due to COVID-19.

Testing is not required if you do not have symptoms.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19. Many of the symptoms can be managed at home. Drink plenty of fluids, get plenty of rest and use a humidifier or hot shower to ease a cough or sore throat. Over the counter medication (e.g. Tylenol) can be used to reduce fever and aches. If you are recording your temperature, do this before taking fever-reducing medicines or wait 4 hours after the last dose.

When a disease is new such as COVID-19, there is no vaccine until one is developed. Possible vaccines are under investigation. It can take time to develop a new vaccine.

Most people recover from coronaviruses on their own. People who develop a more serious illness may need supportive care in or out of the hospital. If you do need to see a health care provider, call them ahead of time so they can arrange for you to be assessed safely. Wear a mask to protect others.

Doctors and nurse practitioners are available to provide in-person care during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some offices may offer telephone and video appointments as well. If you need care, please contact your health care provider. Or use the HealthLinkBC Directory or call **8-1-1** to find a health care provider in your community.

When seeing a health care provider, please tell them

- Your symptoms
- Where you have been travelling or living
- If you had close or prolonged contact with a sick person, especially if they had a fever, cough or difficulty breathing

For more information on what you can do if you have symptoms, see Symptoms and COVID-19.

For information on the most current research on the use of therapies in the management of COVID-19, see BC Centre for Disease Control: Treatments

Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic can bring up feelings of confusion, sadness and anxiety that are hard to manage. You may find yourself stressed out over the latest news or feeling lonely during self-isolation. These are normal feelings when faced with uncertainty. It is more important than ever to take care of your mental health and be kind to yourself. Learn more about mental health and COVID-19:

- Mental Health and COVID-19
- BC Centre for Disease Control: Mental well-being during COVID-19
- Government of Canada: Taking Care of Your Mental Health (PDF 371KB)

Useful Resources

There is a lot of information about COVID-19 and the province's response to the pandemic. For a list of the trusted sources we use at HealthLinkBC 8-1-1 to provide British Columbians with health information and advice, see Useful Resources for COVID-19.

For information on COVID-19 in other languages, see BC Centre for Disease Control's Translated Content page. American sign language videos are also available.

If you have concerns or questions about your health contact HealthLinkBC (**8-1-1**) at any time or speak with your health care provider.

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