

# Frequently Asked Questions – Public Health Measures on COVID-19

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## Source:

These frequently asked questions are taken from the Public Health Agency of Canada website – [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)

## What is the risk to Canadians?

At this time, the Public Health Agency of Canada 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. The Public Health Agency of Canada, along with provincial, territorial and community partners, continues to reassess the public health risk, based on the best available evidence as the situation evolves.

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 before travelling.

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

- cruise ships
- 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 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.

### **What are the 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. 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.

## **What should I do to avoid getting this virus?**

You should follow the advice provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada to the general population.

You can play an active role in staying healthy and preventing the spread of COVID-19. Follow these simple steps recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada:

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- cough or sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands; and
- stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others.

For more information on COVID-19 prevention, consult Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Outbreak update at [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus).

## **Why is so much attention being paid to hand hygiene?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada has indicated that hand washing with soap and water is the best defense against common infectious diseases. Should soap and water not be readily available, employees should be encouraged to use hand sanitizer.

## **What if there is a boil water advisory?**

### **Handwashing and drinking water advisories**

One recommendation to prevent the spread of viruses is to wash your hands.

In the case of Boil Water Advisories and Do Not Consume Advisories you can still wash your hands with soap and water. When a boil water advisory is in place you should bring water to a rolling boil for a minute before it is used.

Bottled water should be used for hand washing during Do Not Use Advisories. For information on drinking water advisories visit <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1538160229321/1538160276874>

## **What is a boil water advisory?**

Boil water advisories advise home users that they should bring their tap water to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute **before** they:

- drink the water
- use the water for other purposes, such as to:
  - cook
  - feed pets
  - brush their teeth
  - make soups or ice cubes
  - wash fruits and vegetables
  - make infant formula or other drinks

During a boil water advisory, **do not** use tap water to bathe those who need help, such as:

- infants
- toddlers
- the elderly

Give them sponge baths instead so they avoid swallowing the water.

Boil water advisories are issued when:

- there are problems with the water treatment system, such as chlorine levels that are too low
- the water has disease-causing:
  - viruses
  - bacteria
  - parasites

## **Do not consume advisories**

Do not consume advisories are issued when the water system has contaminants, like lead, that can't be removed from the water by boiling.

Do not consume advisories are also called do not drink advisories. These advisories tell the public that they should **not** use their tap water to:

- cook
- drink
- feed pets
- brush their teeth
- make soups or ice cubes
- wash fruits and vegetables
- make infant formula or other drinks

During a do not consume advisory, **do not** use tap water to bathe those who need help, such as:

- infants
- toddlers
- the elderly

Give them sponge baths instead so they avoid swallowing the water by accident.

The water can still be used to shower and bathe:

- adults
- older children

### **Do not use advisories**

Do not use advisories warn the public that they **should not** use their tap water **for any reason**. A do not use advisory is issued when:

- using the water poses a health risk
- the water system has pollutants that can't be removed through boiling
- being exposed to the water through bathing could, perhaps due to a chemical spill, irritate the:
  - skin
  - eyes

## **When clean, running water isn't available**

Sometimes clean water is not available - for example, during a 'boil water' advisory or when you're in a location where the source or quality of water is not known. Treat water by boiling it for one minute and let it cool to room temperature. To wash your hands:

- Get a bowl large enough to fit your hands in
- Remove jewellery
- Pour enough water into the bowl to cover hands
- Wet hands up to the wrists
- Apply enough soap to cover hands
- Work soap under the fingernails and around and between joints and fingers
- Remove all soap and dirt by moving your hands around in the bowl
- Dry your hands with a clean cloth or paper towel while taking special care to dry thoroughly between fingers
- Throw out the water from the hand washing bowl following each individual use

## **What should I do if I 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

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.

## **How is coronavirus diagnosed?**

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

## **What is the treatment for 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.

## **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.

## **How do we prevent coronavirus?**

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

## **What should I do if I travelled to an at-risk area**

If you have travelled to Hubei province, China, Iran or Italy 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 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 (unless directed to seek medical care)
  - if you must leave your home, wear a mask 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
- 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

## *Being prepared*

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

## **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

### **What are the proper hygiene practices?**

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

## **Should we wear 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.

## **What are the 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:

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### **How Canada is monitoring COVID-19?**

The health and safety of all Canadians is our top priority.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with provinces, territories and international partners, including the World Health Organization, to actively monitor the situation. Global efforts are focused on containment of the outbreak and the prevention of further spread.

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer of Canada is in close contact with provincial and territorial Chief Medical Officers of Health to ensure that any cases of COVID-19 occurring in Canada continue to be rapidly identified and managed in order to protect the health of Canadians.

Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory is performing diagnostic testing for the virus that causes COVID-19. The laboratory is working in close collaboration with provincial and territorial public health laboratories, which are now able to test for COVID-19.

## **Where can I learn more about 2019 COVID-19?**

You can visit [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus) for more information, including frequently asked questions about the virus and the Government of Canada's actions. You can also contact the Government of Canada's information line at 1-833-784-4397.