

novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for Public

Issued by the AHS Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC)

What's happening in Alberta?

Learn the latest here: ahs.ca/covid

What's **NEW**:

- COVID-19 screening criteria has expanded to include anyone with fever and/or a cough or shortness of breath who has travelled to anywhere outside of Canada in the 14 days before they were ill: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>

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.
- COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that had not been detected previously in humans. It is the cause of the respiratory outbreak in mainland China that has now been detected in many other countries around the world. The highest concentration of cases in China is in Hubei province.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Patients with COVID-19 infection have reported mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and difficulty breathing
- While COVID-19 can cause serious illness, many patients have only mild symptoms. It appears the illness caused by COVID-19 tends to be less severe than some other coronaviruses like the one that caused SARS.

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.
- There is uncertainty about the possibility of spread from an infected person who doesn't yet have symptoms, but this is unlikely to contribute much to the spread of the virus.

Should I be worried about COVID-19?

- It is important to remember that the current risk in Alberta is low.
- AHS and Alberta Health are prepared for COVID-19 response in the province.
- We are carefully monitoring the situation and have taken the necessary steps to find cases and prevent the ongoing spread of the virus.

Who should be evaluated for COVID-19?

- People who develop a **fever and/or cough or difficulty breathing** should be evaluated for COVID-19 if, within 14 days before symptoms began, **they met 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**. You will be directed to a health care facility if it is necessary.
- 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 should people do if they have recently been in Iran, or Hubei province, and do not have symptoms?

- Travellers returning from these areas are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection as people may not be aware they have been in close contact with someone who is sick.
- We are also aware of early evidence that COVID-19 can cause a range of mild to severe symptoms and individuals may not recognize when they first develop symptoms, because the symptoms can be similar to a cold or flu.
- As a precautionary measure, we are asking all travellers to Iran and Hubei province to follow the same precautions.
- If you are returning or have returned from Iran or Hubei province in the last 14 days, we recommend that you self-isolate and limit contact with others for 14 days since that visit.
 - Avoid close contact with other people, especially those with chronic conditions, a compromised immune system, or seniors.
 - Watch for symptoms like fever, cough, or difficulty breathing in yourself or family members
 - At first sign of symptoms, call Health Link 811. 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

What about people who have recently been in mainland China, but not Hubei? And what about people who have recently travelled to other countries outside of Canada? What should they do?

- If you have been in mainland China outside of Hubei province or any other country outside Canada in the last 14 days, call Health Link 811 if you have had either of the following exposures:
 - Had contact with someone with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19
 - You were in a health care facility where COVID-19 cases were diagnosed or treated
- If you did not have either of these exposures, we recommend that you:
 - Monitor yourself daily for 14 days after leaving the affected area for symptoms like fever, cough or difficulty breathing
 - At first sign of symptoms, call Health Link 811. 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.

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.

Is this self-isolation mandatory?

- It is not mandatory.
- Based on what we have learned from this and previous infectious disease outbreaks (SARS, Ebola) returning travellers from affected areas follow Public Health advice and often go over and above the precautionary measures.
- Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services will continue monitoring the situation to assess any need for adjustments.

What should people do if they have been in a hospital where COVID-19 cases were diagnosed or treated, but they were NOT in close contact with a case?

- If people were in a hospital where COVID-19 cases were diagnosed or treated, it is not necessary to self-isolate as long as they were not in close contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
- Individuals should monitor themselves daily for 14 days after their last contact with the hospital for symptoms like fever, cough or difficulty breathing. At the first sign of symptoms, they should immediately self-isolate and call Health Link 811.
- **Self-Isolation Information Sheet:** <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/self-isolation-information-sheet>

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/info/Page14955.aspx>
 - 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/info/Page14511.aspx>

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.

Should I cancel or change my travel plans?

- The Government of Canada is recommending that Canadians avoid non-essential travel to China and avoid all travel to Hubei province including Wuhan city.
- Travellers should consider postponing travel to Iran, Northern Italy, and South Korea due to unknown or sustained community spread of COVID-19.
- Travellers should be aware that some countries have implemented special entry and exit restrictions. Before travelling, verify if the authorities of both your current location and your destination have implemented any restrictions that may affect your travel plans, including entry requirements, border closures, and flight suspensions.
- For the most up-to-date information, please check: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notice> for travel health notices.

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.
- If any cases are diagnosed among travellers to Alberta, Public Health will be following up with anyone who was exposed.

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 worried about catching COVID-19. Should I wear a mask?

- 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.
- When sick, wearing a mask helps prevent passing on illnesses to other people. That is why we ask people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms to wear a mask and clean their hands when visiting an emergency department or clinic.
- Wearing masks in public, with a goal of preventing spread of illness, can be a way some communities show respect for others.
- While we do not recommend wearing masks for healthy individuals, it is important that any person who does wear a mask is treated with respect and not fear.
- We ask that you do not make assumptions about the risk of others having novel coronavirus based on their ethnicity or country of origin.
- 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.

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](#)
 - [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
 - [World Health Organization](#)