

novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for Public

Issued by the AHS Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC)

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Please note: every effort is made to keep this FAQ current; however, for the very most current information on the situation in Alberta, please visit www.alberta.ca/covid19.

If you are a healthcare worker in Alberta, please visit www.ahs.ca/covid.

What's happening in Alberta?

Alberta continues to see cases of COVID-19. For current case count, visit www.alberta.ca/covid19.

Additional information for travelers, schools, daycares, employers and all Albertans, can also be found at www.alberta.ca/covid19.

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 new strains of the virus that had 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 and cough but other symptoms may include:
 - sore throat
 - runny nose
 - nasal congestion
 - shortness of breath
 - difficulty breathing
- 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.
- There is a risk of death in severe cases.
- 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 spread mainly by coughing, sneezing or direct contact with a sick person or with surfaces they have recently touched.
- It is not an airborne illness.

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

Visit www.ahs.ca/covid and complete the online self-assessment tool to determine if you should receive testing for COVID-19.

What should I do if I have symptoms and think I have COVID-19?

If you are sick or think you may have been exposed to COVID-19:

- You MUST [self-isolate](#) and visit www.ahs.ca/covid and complete the online self-assessment tool to determine if you need testing for COVID-19.
- Please do not visit a hospital, physician's office, lab or healthcare facility without consulting Health Link (811) first.
- If your symptoms worsen, call 811. We are experiencing heavy call volumes and will get to your call as quickly as we can.
- Call 911 if you are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention. Inform them that you may have COVID-19.

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:

- Stay home. Now is the time to stay home and avoid social and other outings that are not essential.
- If you must leave your home, make sure you practice proper [physical distancing](#).
- 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>

I am worried about catching COVID-19. Should I wear gloves when outside of my house or in public places?

- Medical gloves are a very important component of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers. However, gloves do not need to be worn by members of the general public during their daily activities, such as when grocery shopping.
- Gloves can create a false sense of security. If not used and disposed of properly, wearing gloves may provide another surface for the virus to live on – potentially encouraging virus transmission.
- Gloves are not a substitute for proper hand hygiene.
- We recommend frequent and thorough [hand washing](#) (with soap and water for 20 seconds), and covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your face, nose or mouth regardless of whether gloves are being worn. These remain the best evidence-based ways to prevent the spread of respiratory illness.
- For those who choose to wear gloves, proper glove use must be practiced:
 - Hands should always be washed and/or sanitized prior to putting on gloves and after taking gloves off.
 - Gloves should be changed when they become soiled or torn.
 - Change gloves if you touch your face – eyes, nose or mouth – or cover a cough or sneeze with your hands while wearing gloves.
 - Disposable gloves should be thrown out and not used again once they have been taken off.
 - Reusable gloves must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

I am worried about catching COVID-19. Should I wear a mask if I have to leave my house or when in public?

- Wearing a non-medical mask, such as a homemade cloth mask, has not been proven to protect the person wearing it.
- However, wearing a non-medical mask may be helpful in protecting others around you.
- This is because face coverings are another way to cover your mouth and nose to prevent respiratory droplets from contaminating other people or surfaces.
- Additionally, wearing a mask may stop you from touching your nose and mouth.

If you choose to wear a non-medical mask or face covering:

- Ensure your mask is well-fitted and does not gape at the sides.
- Be aware that masks can become contaminated on the outside. Avoid moving or adjusting the mask. Assume the mask has been contaminated and take proper precautions.
- Critically, if you wear a mask, you must wash your hands before putting it on, as well as before and after taking it off.
- Cloth masks should be worn only a short time, as there is some evidence that they can trap virus particles after they become damp, which may put the wearer at greater risk.
- For those choosing to wear non-medical masks, it may be prudent to carry a bag with several clean masks in it, as well as a plastic bag that can be used to safely store used masks until they can be washed at home.
- It is critical that used masks be carefully handled to avoid spreading infection to others.

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 to members of the public, beyond that provided by a procedure mask.

Did the criteria for COVID-19 testing change?

A new approach to testing for COVID-19, implemented in Alberta on March 23, prioritizes groups at highest risk of local exposure, as well as at-risk populations. This priority list for testing was expanded on April 6.

As of March 23, travellers who returned to Alberta from outside of Canada after March 12 and have mild symptoms are no longer being tested for COVID-19. Instead, the same advice applied to all Albertans applies to them - self-isolate at home and away from others.

This change is effective going forward, so anyone who had already been told by Health Link that they'll be tested will still get tested.

Testing will be prioritized for the following individuals, if they are **symptomatic**:

- people who are hospitalized with respiratory illness;
- residents of continuing care and other similar facilities;
- healthcare workers with respiratory symptoms;
- group home workers and shelter workers;
- first responders, including all firefighters, EMS, police and RCMP;
- those involved in COVID-19 enforcement, including police, peace officers, bylaw officers, environmental health officers, and fish and wildlife officers; and

- correctional facility staff, working in provincial or federal facilities.

In addition, effective April 7, anyone 65 years old or older who has fever, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat will be eligible for testing. Older Albertans are at higher risk of complications if they are infected with COVID-19. Identifying infections in Albertans over the age of 65 will help AHS:

- prevent the spread to high-risk populations living in close quarters,
- more closely trace any community transmission among the testing groups, and
- provide more valuable information on the effects of our public health measures.

Why did AHS change the testing criteria?

Our testing priorities should fulfill several objectives:

- First, they should allow us to diagnose and treat those individuals at greatest risk of severe outcomes; which is why we test those who are hospitalized with respiratory illnesses, and Albertans over the age of 65.
- Second, they should allow us to trace the spread of the virus, with a priority on those who are at highest risk of exposure, and identify steps to limit the spread. That is why we seek to identify community transmission and transmission to front-line health care workers.
- Third, who we test should provide us with accurate information about the effects our public health measures are having and help us determine if we need to take further steps.

Not everyone who feels sick needs to get tested. These priorities are based on the best available information about COVID-19 available at this time.

I feel sick and I can't get through to Health Link, what do I do?

- Health Link 811 continues to experience very high volume due to individuals seeking advice on COVID-19. We thank you for your patience.
- We have developed a simple online assessment tool to help you decide whether you need to call 811 to be tested for COVID-19. Visit the online tool at ahs.ca/covid.
- You can also:
 - Call your primary health provider for advice.
 - Call 911 if you are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention (such as shortness of breath) and inform them that you may have COVID-19.
- Even if the assessment tool indicates that COVID-19 testing is not recommended, please continue to stay at home and self-isolate for at least 10 days after your symptoms started and until you no longer have symptoms.

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.

What are your recommendations for people who are immune compromised, have asthma or at high risk of severe illness for other medical reasons?

- Stay at home, avoiding public places and social interaction.
- If you must go out in public, practice proper [physical distancing](#).
- For essential outings, at very least reschedule your visit for non-peak periods.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, or mouth.
- Do not have contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.
- Call 911 if you become seriously ill and need immediate medical attention. Inform them that you may have COVID-19.

When should I go to the hospital?

- Call 911 if you are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention. Inform them that you may have COVID-19.
- If you do not need urgent medical attention and you think you may have COVID-19, you can instead call 811 for health assessment and referral.

My loved one has or is being tested for COVID-19 and we live in the same house. How can I take care of them and not get sick myself?

- If at all possible, try to ensure that the ill person has a designated bedroom and bathroom.
- Maintain physical distance from the ill individual, as much as possible.
- Visitors should not come to the home.
- Do not allow ill person to prepare meals for others, and ensure that the ill person uses separate preparation area or at least prepares meals at a different time, washing all surfaces after.
- Avoid sharing household items like dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels and pillows.
- Wash your hands frequently, with soap and warm water.
- Frequently sanitize all surfaces, particular hand rails, door knobs, sink taps, toilets, and other items of frequent touching.
- Advise loved one to cover their coughs and sneezes with their arm, not their hand, and to practice good respiratory etiquette at all times.
- Monitor yourself for symptoms and call Health Link for assessment and advice if you have symptoms yourself.

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.
- You should avoid having visitors to your home, but it is okay for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food on the doorstep.
- 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.

- If you do develop symptoms, you can complete the online assessment tool for additional advice or call Health Link at 811.

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.

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 Alberta and 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
 - Public Health Agency of Canada: canada.ca
 - World Health Organization: who.int

EVENTS and OTHER RESTRICTIONS

What restrictions are in place, related to public spaces?

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alberta has implemented the following public health restrictions:

- Student attendance at schools is prohibited.
- In-person classes at post-secondary institutions are cancelled until further notice. Campuses remain open.
 - Government is working with post-secondary institutions to ensure students are not prevented from being eligible for admission to post-secondary studies for the upcoming school year.
- All licensed child care facilities, out-of-school care programs and preschool programs are closed with the exception of a select few who will be providing child care to essential workers.
- Effective immediately, **no visitors** will be permitted to visit residents in Long-term Care, Supportive Living, Congregate Living and Hospice Care Settings in Alberta. Likewise, AHS is restricting all visitors to AHS Acute Care (hospital) facilities. See [Information for People Visiting Patients](#) for more information.
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- Places of worship are no longer exempt from restrictions on mass gatherings.
- To limit the amount of time Albertans are spending in large crowds and crowded spaces, all Albertans are prohibited from attending public recreational facilities and private entertainment facilities, including gyms, swimming pools, arenas, science centres, museums, art galleries, community centres, children's play centres, casinos, racing entertainment centres, and bingo halls.
- All dine-in services are prohibited. Take-out, delivery and drive-through services are still allowed.
- Until further notice, all Albertans are restricted from attending bars and nightclubs, where minors are prohibited by law.

- Grocery stores, shopping centres, health-care facilities, airports, the legislature and other essential services are not included in this mandatory closure.
- Likewise, at this time not-for-profit community kitchens, soup kitchens and religious kitchens are exempt, but sanitization practices are expected to be in place and support will be in place for this practice.

Effective March 25, the province has instituted new enforcement measures for those not respecting public health restrictions. Find more information on [Alberta.ca](https://alberta.ca).

What restrictions are in place for events?

Events with more than 15 attendees are cancelled.

- This includes large sporting events, conferences and community events, as well as worship gatherings and family events – including weddings and funerals.

Find more information on [Alberta.ca/covid19](https://alberta.ca/covid19)

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

- Yes – AHS, in collaboration with Alberta Health and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, is actively responding to this pandemic, and worked proactively to be prepared.
- We are focused on controlling the spread of disease, reducing illness and death, minimizing disruptions to the daily life of Albertans, helping to minimize economic impacts and support an efficient and effective use of resources during response and recovery.

TRAVEL:**Should I change or cancel my travel plans outside of Canada?**

- Yes. Travel outside Canada is **not recommended** at this time.
 - 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>.

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

- ALL travellers who returned to Alberta from outside Canada in the last 14 days MUST self-isolate immediately for 14 days after the date of return and monitor for symptoms. Complete the online self-assessment tool at ahs.ca/covid to determine if you should receive testing for COVID-19.
- **If you have symptoms:**
 - Anyone who has symptoms, including cough, fever or sore throat, must also self-isolate for 10 days after the first onset of symptoms, or until their symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.
 - If you develop symptoms – cough, sore throat, fever or difficulty breathing – stay home and complete the online COVID-19 self-assessment. Do not go to the ER or doctor's office.
 - Please do not visit a hospital, physician's office, lab or healthcare facility without consulting Health Link (811) first.
 - If your symptoms worsen, call 811. We are experiencing heavy call volumes and will get to your call as quickly as we can.
 - Call 911 if you are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention. Inform them that you may have COVID-19.

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

- 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.

Flights with confirmed cases

As more flights confirm passengers with COVID-19, Albertans should monitor their air travel even if it was limited to within Canada. Flights that have confirmed cases and the affected seats is [posted online as information is confirmed](#).

- Passengers in affected seats are considered close contacts and are at risk of exposure. Please self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.
- Other passengers should monitor for symptoms, but are not required to self-isolate unless they returned to Canada after March 12.

If you recently returned from a flight:

- [check the list of affected flights for updates](#) (updated March 22, 1:00 pm)
- self-isolate for 14 days if your seat was affected or you returned to Canada after March 12
- monitor for symptoms such as cough, fever, fatigue or difficulty breathing
- If, at any time in your 14 day period of self-isolation, you develop symptoms of illness, you are required to stay home for 10 days from date of symptom onset, or until symptoms have cleared, whichever is longer. This may extend your period of self-isolation to longer than 14 days.

- [take the COVID-19 self-assessment](#) to determine next steps and find out if testing is required

I live outside of Canada but have a trip planned to Alberta this week/month. Should I still come?

- Travel should be limited as much as possible. Essential travel only should proceed.
- Please follow travel guidance from Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html>.
- If you do not currently have symptoms of COVID-19 and are planning to come to Alberta from outside Canada, you will be asked to monitor yourself for the development of symptoms of COVID-19.

If you develop symptoms, you will need to isolate yourself immediately and call Health Link 811.