Frequently Asked Questions about 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

The risk of this virus spreading within British Columbia remains low at this time. We are closely monitoring the situation as it evolves and will notify the public if the measures in B.C. change.

Anyone who is concerned they may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of, the coronavirus should contact their primary-care provider, local public health office or call 811. 8-1-1 is a free-of-charge provincial health information and advice phone line available in British Columbia, it provides translation services in more than 130 languages.

For more information and latest updates on novel coronavirus (COVID-19), follow the BC Centre for Disease Control on Twitter @CDCofBC or visit the website: http://www.bccdc.ca/
For the latest B.C. government joint statement on COVID-19, visit BC Gov News- Ministry of Health: https://news.gov.bc.ca/ministries/health

1. About the virus
   • Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found mostly in animals. In humans, they can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV).

   • The symptoms reported to date are similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold. They include cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing.

   • While many of the characteristics of COVID-19 are still unknown, mild to severe illness has been reported for confirmed cases. The majority of people, approximately 82%, only experience mild symptoms according to the World Health Organization.

   • Anyone concerned that they may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of the novel coronavirus, should contact their primary care provider, local public health office, or call 8-1-1.

2. How is it spread?
   • Coronavirus is transmitted via larger liquid droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. The virus can enter through these droplets through the eyes, nose or throat if you are in close contact. The virus is not known to be airborne (e.g. transmitted through the particles floating in the air) and it is not something that comes in through the skin.

   • It can be spread by touch if a person has used their hands to cover their mouth or nose when they cough. That’s why we recommend you咳嗽 or sneeze into your arm and wash your hands regularly.
3. **What is the difference between droplet contact and airborne transmission?**
   - **Droplet Contact:** Some diseases can be transferred by large infected droplets contacting surfaces of the eye, nose, or mouth. For example, large droplets that may be visible to the naked eye are generated when a person sneezes or coughs. These droplets typically spread only one to two metres and are too large to float in the air (i.e. airborne) and quickly fall to the ground. Influenza and SARS are two examples of diseases capable of being transmitted from droplet contact. Currently, health experts believe that coronavirus can also be transmitted in this way.

   - **Airborne transmission:** This occurs when much smaller evaporated droplets or dust particles containing the microorganism float in the air for long periods of time. Transmission occurs when others breathe the microorganism into their throat or lungs. Examples of diseases capable of airborne transmission include measles, chickenpox and tuberculosis. Currently, health experts believe that coronavirus cannot be transmitted through airborne transmission.

4. **How do I protect myself and my family?**
   - Follow the same advice that public health officials recommend for the cold and flu season: wash your hands often with soap and water, cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, avoid others who are unwell, and stay home when you are sick.

   - The most important thing you can do to prevent coronavirus and other illnesses is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face.

   - Cover your mouth when you cough so you're not exposing other people. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others. Contact your health-care provider ahead of time so you can be safely assessed.

5. **Will wearing a mask protect me?**
   - Masks should be used by sick people to prevent transmission to other people. A mask will help keep a person's droplets in.

   - It may be less effective to wear a mask in the community when a person is not sick themselves. Masks may give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask).

   - Health-care workers will wear surgical masks, eye protection and gowns in order to protect themselves and other patients. During health-care procedures in which aerosol sprays may be generated (for example, when giving certain inhaled medications), health-care workers should wear specialized masks.
6. **What are the symptoms?**
   - Symptoms for COVID-19 include fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
   - If you have traveled to Italy, Iran and Hubei Province, China, and develop these symptoms, avoid contact with others and call ahead to a health-care professional. Do the same if you develop symptoms and have been in contact with a confirmed case or a traveller returning from the affected area with these symptoms.
   - Tell your health-care professional:
     o your symptoms;
     o where you have been travelling or living;
     o if you had direct contact with animals (for example, if you visited a live animal market); and
     o if you had close contact with a sick person, especially if they had a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
   - Call ahead to the health-care facility you are planning to visit so they can be prepared to take precautions. In an emergency, describe your symptoms, travel history and any sick contacts when you first arrive at the facility so that appropriate precautions can be taken.
   - Until more is understood about the virus, older people and people with a weakened immune system or underlying medical condition are considered at higher risk of severe disease.

7. **What is the risk to the public?**
   - The risk of spread of this virus remains low at this time. The evidence to date shows that COVID-19 is spread by large droplets which are produced primarily during coughing and sneezing. You would need close and prolonged contact, like what you would expect to occur within a household, to transmit the virus.
   - We are prepared to detect and respond to prevent the spread of serious infectious diseases, and are confident in our capacity to prevent further spread and transmission of COVID-19.

8. **What if I have been travelling, should I self-isolate?**
   - If you have spent time in Italy, Iran or Hubei Province, China in the previous 14 days, federal and provincial authorities ask that you self-isolate for 14 days, meaning stay at home and limit contact with others.
   - People that are returning to or visiting B.C. from outside Canada should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever or cough for 14 days. Those who develop symptoms should stay home and call their health-care provider or 8-1-1 to discuss any need for testing and follow up.
• Avoid situations where you could infect other people such as social gatherings, work, school/university, public transportation and public spaces. It is okay for friends, family or others to drop off items you may need but limit your contact with people as much as possible.

• Monitor yourself and your children closely for symptoms similar to the flu or common cold such as coughing, sneezing, sore throat, fever or difficulty breathing. If any symptoms arise, connect with your primary care provider, local public health office or call 8-1-1 and tell them of your recent travel. (8-1-1 is available in the language in which people feel most comfortable, through a request for translation services, including Mandarin and Cantonese.)

• Canadians travelling abroad are encouraged to consult travel.gc.ca regularly as recommendations may change over the course of your travel as new information becomes available.

9. How is B.C. preparing for a spread of COVID-19?
• The Ministry of Health and BCCDC, working with many partners, have plans and are prepared to respond to new illnesses of public health concern.

• We have been actively monitoring the situation with COVID-19 over the past weeks, together with national and international groups, to be ready for identifying and caring for those who may have COVID-19 and to prevent its spread. B.C. developed one of the first tests to confirm COVID-19.

• A Provincial Coordination Committee is in place to respond to COVID-19 in British Columbia. This committee will co-ordinate provincial preparedness and response across our health sector.

10. Advice for students and families – travel & field trips
• Students and families considering travel should continue to monitor the Government of Canada travel site for the latest travel advisories: www.travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories

• Travellers should understand that as global efforts to contain COVID-19 continue, the availability of health care services in some areas may be limited and travel restrictions may be put in place suddenly.

• Students or staff returning from Italy, Iran and Hubei, China or those who have been in contact with someone who has been infected with COVID-19 should stay home from school for 14 days and monitor for symptoms closely, see advice above. Students required to stay home will have opportunities for distance learning or catch up once the students are cleared to return.
• Cruise ships continue to be high-risk environments for transmission. On March 9, the federal government has recommended that Canadians avoid all cruise ship travel due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. Please visit Health Canada’s website for more details: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html#cruise

11. Information for travellers
• People arriving in Canada from Italy, Iran and Hubei Province, China are asked to stay home and self-isolate for 14 days and monitor closely for symptoms of illness. If any symptoms arise, connect with your primary care provider, local public health office or call 8-1-1.

• All other travellers who are returning to or visiting B.C. from outside Canada are asked to monitor themselves and their children closely for symptoms, and if any arise, to limit their contact with others and call 8-1-1.

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• Canada also has active COVID-19 travel advisories for other countries and regions, go to Government of Canada for latest travel alerts.

• British Columbians should monitor their health while they are travelling and after they return. If you have any symptoms at all of a cold or influenza, even if they're mild, stay away from others. If you have been to areas, particularly where we know there has been transmission of COVID-19, then call your health care provider, call 8-1-1, call public health. Always tell health care providers about recent travel if you become ill after returning to Canada.

12. What’s being done to educate and monitor people who are returning from travelling in countries impacted by COVID-19?

• A lot is being done to inform and screen travellers at the airport. The federal government has set up a system at international airports to: find out people who have been to Italy, Iran and Hubei Province, China, confirming where they have travelled to and if they feel well or unwell.

• If they are unwell, they are asked to see a doctor to get tested. If they feel fine, they are given info on symptoms to look for and what to do in case they become sick later. They’re also asked to stay home for 14 days so if they become sick they don’t spread the disease to other people. For more information, visit Health Canada’s website.
13. Can you get sick from people who are asymptomatic (early stage of being sick before they show symptoms of infection)?

- There is still a lot we don’t know about COVID-19 and there are studies underway to better understand it.

- There have been a few instances of transmissions before the person became sick or the symptoms were mild that the person did not know they were sick. Those are exceptions as most people became ill from being in close contact with someone who showed symptoms such as coughing and sneezing, therefore transmitting the virus through droplets. This is why B.C. health officials are focused on putting protection around people who are ill and showing symptoms, in order to decrease the spread to others.

14. Can you get sick from touching a package from China?

- To our knowledge, no one has become ill from touching a package from China so far and the risk is low.

- COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets that come from a person’s throat or lungs when they’re coughing or sneezing. While droplets can fall on surfaces including packages, viruses in the coronavirus family don’t survive very long on surfaces. They are sensitive to the environment and likely won’t survive for the amount of time it takes for packages to travel internationally.

- We recommend washing your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds as a precaution to further lower your risk of getting sick from COVID-19 and other viruses. Whenever you have touched surfaces, packages or other people, wash your hands before you touch your face, take care of other people or prepare food.

Additional information from Health Canada

15. What actions are being taken at Canadian airports to prevent COVID-19?

- New measures have been implemented at the 10 Canadian airports. Measures help to:
  - identify any traveller returning to Canada who may be ill
  - raise awareness among travellers about what they should do if they become sick

- For additional information, please see Canada's response at airports.

16. Will Canada close its borders or start banning flight from China?

- No. The Government of Canada and the provinces and territories have multiple systems in place to prepare for, detect and respond to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in Canada.
We are also aware that China has taken extraordinary measures including conducting exit screenings, and have closed all the flights and transportation from Wuhan and some other affected cities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been engaged and is actively monitoring the situation. With the information currently available for the novel coronavirus, WHO advises that measures to limit the risk of exportation or importation of the disease should be implemented, without unnecessary restrictions of international traffic.


Additional information from the World Health Organization (WHO)

For more commonly asked questions and answers on COVID-19 in Chinese, visit the WHO website. More information in Punjabi is also available on the WHO website.