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

British Columbia has declared a state of emergency and a public health emergency. Public health officials in the province are closely monitoring the situation as it evolves and will continue to notify the public as response measures change in B.C.

Anyone who is concerned they may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of, the coronavirus should use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: https://covid19.thrive.health/ to determine if you need to be tested. You do not need to be tested if you do not have symptoms or you only have mild symptoms that can be managed at home.

If you have non-medical question about COVID-19, please call 1-888-COVID19. You can get the latest information on travel recommendations and physical distancing, as well as access to support and resources from the provincial and federal governments by calling this number. You can reach service representatives seven days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., and information is available in more than 110 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/covid19

For the latest B.C. government statement on COVID-19, visit BC Gov News- Ministry of Health: https://news.gov.bc.ca/ministries/health

1. What is novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?
   - 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.

2. What are the symptoms?
   - Symptoms for COVID-19 include fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- If you develop these symptoms, avoid contact with others and use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: [https://covid19.thrive.health/](https://covid19.thrive.health/) to determine if you need to be tested. If you need to call 811, please provide the information below:
  - your symptoms;
  - where you have been travelling or living;
  - if you had direct contact with animals (for example, if you visited a live animal market); and
  - 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.

3. **Should I get tested for COVID-19?**

   - You do not need to be tested if you have no symptoms or only have mild symptoms that can be managed at home, including returning travellers.

   - You can use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: [https://covid19.thrive.health/](https://covid19.thrive.health/) to determine if you need to be tested.

   - The self-assessment app can also be downloaded at:
     - Web app link: [https://bc.thrive.health/covid19app](https://bc.thrive.health/covid19app)

4. **When should I isolate?**

   - People arriving in Canada from international travel must stay home, self-isolate for 14 days, monitor themselves and their children closely for symptoms of illness. Spot checks will be conducted by the Government of Canada to verify compliance.

   - If any symptoms arise, limit your contact with other people and use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: [https://covid19.thrive.health/](https://covid19.thrive.health/) to determine if you need to be tested.
• If you have common cold or influenza like illness or symptoms compatible with COVID-19, you must self-isolate at home for a minimum of 10 days from symptom onset and until your symptoms have completely resolved.

• For more information on how to self-isolate, visit: http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing-isolation

5. What is the risk of getting sick from COVID-19 in B.C.?
• Everybody needs to be aware that the risk of exposure is not just in one place. It's in your community, too. You need to be taking measures now and everywhere in B.C.

• The risk is higher for older age groups and those of all ages with underlying medical conditions as they are at an increased risk of more severe illness and outcomes.

• The risk will vary between and within localized communities. For example, people living in assisting living or long-term care facilities are at higher risk of infection.

• The risk will vary based on international travel history and type of activities while abroad. Cruise ship travellers or those who participate in mass gathering events have higher risks of exposure.

• You can lower your risk with health precautions like washing your hands with soap and warm water for 20-30 seconds, staying at home when ill, cough or sneeze into your elbow sleeve, throw away used tissues and avoid touching your face. Maintaining social distance like refraining from handshakes, hugs, kisses will also reduce your risk of getting sick.

6. How can I protect myself and my family?
• In addition to physical distancing, the most important thing you can do to prevent infection is to:
  o Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
  o If a sink is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs can be used to clean your hands as long as they are not visibly soiled. If they are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then the alcohol-based hand rubs to effectively clean them
  o Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
  o Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough
  o Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
  o Do not share foods, drinks, utensils, etc.

7. Is it safe to go out to shop, take public transit or go to work?
• At this time in B.C., we are all encouraged to stay home as much as possible. If you do leave your home to go shopping, take public transit or go to work, use common sense approaches to prevent infection and transmission:
  o Wash your hands often and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
  o Try to use public transit or go to stores at off peak times
  o Do not go shopping, take public transit or go to work if you are sick
  o If you have to cough or sneeze, make sure you sneeze or cough into a tissue or the crook of your arm (elbow) and then wash your hands.

Shopping:
• Many malls, shops and stores are limiting their hours or closing their operations entirely in order to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in B.C.
• Consider only shopping once per week for essential supplies and use food delivery services or online shopping where available.
• Avoid crowded places and if a store is busy, consider going somewhere else.
• If you are older or have health conditions, consider asking your family, friends and neighbours to help you get the supplies you need.

8. 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 cough or sneeze into your arm and wash your hands regularly.

9. 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.
10. Can ibuprofen make COVID-19 symptoms worse?

- There is no current evidence that ibuprofen makes COVID-19 worse. Ibuprofen is part of a group of medicines called NSAIDs and includes brand names such as Advil and Motrin. These medicines help with pain, fever or inflammation. Acetaminophen, which includes brand names such as Tylenol, also helps with fever.

- If you take ibuprofen to treat another condition, you should continue taking it.

- To treat symptoms like fever, we recommend first using acetaminophen. If it is not available, you can use ibuprofen as an alternative.

11. 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.

12. 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 that medical and public health experts 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 are ill and showing symptoms, in order to decrease the spread to others.

13. What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

- Use the self-assessment tool to see if you need testing:
• If you have symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or sneezing, avoid contact with others and self-isolate for at least 10 days. While at home, take care of yourself by drinking lots of water and getting plenty of rest. After 10 days, if your temperature is normal and you feel better, you can return to your routine activities. Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean you need to continue to self-isolate for more than 10 days.

• If your symptoms worsen, for example you have mild shortness of breath, contact your health provider or 811 at any time. If you are going to visit your health-care provider, call them ahead of time so they can arrange for you to be assessed safely. Wear a mask in order to protect others.

• If your symptoms are severe, such as difficulty breathing (e.g. struggling to breathe or speaking in single words) or chest pain, call 911 or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

14. I have COVID-19, how do I clean and disinfect my home?

• Clean and disinfect common areas once a day.

• Each day, clean places and surfaces in the rooms that you are staying in. Regular cleaning products are fine for this.

Then disinfect (kill germs) by mixing 1/50 solution of bleach and water (e.g. approximately 20ml bleach per litre of water or 2 ½ ounces per gallon) and applying it to areas that are touched often such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables.

• It is especially important to use bleach to disinfect if you are sharing any common areas with others or if others will be entering the room where you are staying.

16. How is B.C. preparing for a spread of COVID-19?

• The Ministry of Health, the provincial health officer and BCCDC, working with many partners, have plans and are prepared to respond to new illnesses of public health concern.

• They 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.
The B.C. government and the provincial health officer have developed and activated the British Columbia Pandemic Provincial Coordination Plan to respond to the evolving outbreak. For more information about B.C.’s plan, visit: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020PREM0012-000404

The B.C. government has developed a COVID-19 Action plan to provide relief to people and businesses in the province. For more information about the action plan, visit: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020PREM0013-000545

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

17. What provincial supports are available?

Multiple supports are available for those impacted by COVID-19. For more information visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support?utm_campaign=20200319_GCPE_AM_COVID_4_NOTIFICATION_BCGOV_BCGOV_EN_BC_NOTIFICATION

18. How is the B.C. government supporting seniors living independently?

The Province recognizes the incredible groundswell of support in communities across B.C. for our families, friends, and neighbours who are affected by COVID-19.

Among those whose daily life has been impacted are seniors living independently in the community.

As more and more people are appropriately self isolating, many seniors who are able to live independently with the support of family and friends are finding those supports unavailable.

These supports may be as simple as friendly visits and check-ins by phone, or as critical as grocery shopping or prescription drop-offs for essential medications.

Government is responding to this urgent need with a significant investment in community-based senior’s care.

We are investing $50 million in the United Way to support the development of a comprehensive new program to support seniors in community.

The funding will expand current services, and address both geographic and capacity gaps where they exist.
• As part of this investment, we have established a COVID-19 Seniors Working Group to find ways to better support seniors.

• The working group has developed an emergency response plan in partnership with United Way and is providing:
  o Easy access to services through bc211, which is now available provincewide
  o A volunteer program to virtually connect volunteers with seniors at home to provide services such as virtual friendly visits, grocery shopping deliveries, prescription drop-offs and transportation for essential medical appointments

• Information for people with chronic conditions can be found here: [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/vulnerable-populations/people-with-chronic-conditions](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/vulnerable-populations/people-with-chronic-conditions)

19. Can people still visit friends or families in care facilities?

• To protect the elderly and the most vulnerable populations to COVID-19, effective March 16, visitations to long-term care facilities are restricted to essential visits only.

• Essential visits include compassionate visits for end-of-life care and visits that support care plans for residents based on resident and family needs, for example, families who routinely visit to provide assistance with feeding or mobility.

• It is important that we take these steps to ensure seniors remain protected from COVID-19.

• We need to weigh the benefits of each visit with the risks in each instance.

• Most people who become infected with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness that will not require medical care, but those who are vulnerable to the disease – those who are elderly or who have underlying conditions that compromise the immune system – are at risk for severe illness.

• Seniors residing in long term care facilities are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, which requires enhanced protection measures aimed at limiting the spread of the virus in Long Term Care homes.

• Additionally, COVID-19 may lead to increased pressure in the acute care system, resulting in the need to transfer appropriate alternate level of care patients to long term care facilities.
• Again, our goal is to keep seniors safe across the province and before each shift long term care home workers are being screened.

• We know that this will be a challenge for some people in our community because you will not be able to see your loved one as simply and as easily as we have in the past. Long term care homes are going out of their way to try and put in provisions to allow you to connect, even if you're not physically present.

20. Should I buy extra food, medication and supplies to prepare for COVID-19?

• It is important for everyone to make sure they have what they need to remain healthy.

• However, it doesn't mean you need to go out and stockpile things; take a look at what you have already at home before you purchase more.

• Cleaning your hands regularly is important, so carry a alcohol-based hand sanitizer, for when you are outside of our home and having access to soap and water are important as well.

• In terms of medications, the Ministry of Health and the provincial health officer have worked with the College of Pharmacists to advise pharmacies to provide patients with a prescription refill or an emergency supply of their medications if needed. This will give physicians more time to care for patients with acute care needs.

• British Columbians are asked to respect this temporary arrangement and are reminded that there is no need to stockpile medication.

• In short, please be thoughtful and reflect on the consequences of buying excessively. If you buy much more than you need, it means the next person in line who really has a shortage at home will not be able to get what they need.

21. Are all public events and gatherings cancelled?

• The provincial health officer encourages everyone to practice physical distancing to limit transmission of COVID-19. These efforts are not forever but are important now.

• You can still shop for groceries and do activities where you can maintain social and physical distance with other people.

• Effective March 16, the Ministry of Health and the provincial health officer have issued an order prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people. This includes indoor and outdoor sporting events, conferences,
meetings, religious gatherings, weddings or other similar events. This threshold has been selected, as it is much easier to maintain important physical distancing to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

22. Will schools, daycare centres and workplaces close temporarily?

- On March 17, the Minister of Education announced that all classes from Kindergarten to grade 12 are suspended indefinitely. No set date when in class room instruction will continue.

- Every student set to graduate in grade 12 will graduate. All efforts will be made to ensure those who need literacy requirement will get them. Graduation assessment for grade 10 and 11 will be postponed. There will be an ongoing effort to ensure classes get underway smoothly at some point in the future.

- Licensed childcare centres remain open at this time. The health of children, staff and parents are very paramount, that is why on March 23, the Minister of Finance made the following announcement:
  - The B.C. government will continue to provide funding to child care centres, even if they are closed or their regular operations have been disrupted.
  - Child care centres that choose to stay open to provide care to the children of essential workers will be eligible to have their funding increased to 75% of their costs.

- Some post-secondary institutions have classes with more than 50 students and public health officials are working with them to take measures to address this situation.

- On March 23, the Minister of Finance announced that to help people with B.C. student loans, the Province is freezing B.C. student loan payments for six months starting March 30, 2020. Federal student loans are being frozen as well.

- As of March 12, the Ministry of Health and the provincial health officer have asked employers to excuse staff for sick leave without requiring a doctor’s note, if their employees are ill or required to self-isolate. They are also reinforcing that if you have symptoms and may have been exposed to COVID-19, you should use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: https://covid19.thrive.health/ to determine if you need to be tested. You do not need to be tested if you do not have symptoms or you only have mild symptoms that and can be managed at home.

- There have been reports of employers requiring all their staff to get tested. Only a health-care professional can determine whether you require a test – and employers should not require employees to have a test if a health-care provider has recommended against it.
• Sufficient physical distancing of one to two meters should be incorporated for workers and customers for businesses and services that will remain open to provide transportation, keep our communities safe and provide essential goods and services.

• The province recognizes this will have a significant economic and social impact and want to reassure British Columbians that these are temporary measures required to protect the health of the public at this critical time of pandemic. The Ministry of Health and the provincial health officer will be reassessing these conditions on an ongoing basis as the pandemic evolves.

• On March 23, the Province announced a recovery plan that will dedicate funding to particularly hard-hit parts of our economy, such as the tourism, hospitality and culture sectors.

• The B.C. government is partnering with business and labour leaders to build an economic stimulus plan. The Province has allocated $1.5 billion for economic recovery.

26. Information on how we can play a part in keeping our communities safe and healthy

• Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.

• If a sink is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs can be used to clean your hands as long as they are not visibly soiled. If they are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then the alcohol-based hand rubs to effectively clean them.

• Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

• Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough.

• Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

• Do not share foods, drinks, utensils, etc.

• Keep about 2 meters of distance between yourselves and others.

• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Keep in touch with friends and families with technology: call, text, email or meet virtually to support each other.

• You can also join a provincewide volunteer program to virtually connect with seniors living in your communities and provide services such as virtual friendly visits, grocery shopping deliveries, prescription drop-offs and transportation for essential medical appointments.

27. Information for travellers
• International visitors are not allowed to enter Canada, except diplomats and flight crews and immediate family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

• Only essential traffic between Canada and U.S. is allowed: Canadians and Americans who need to cross the border to do essential work or for other urgent reasons are allowed to travel, this includes trucking, which allows food, fuel and medicine to move between Canada and the U.S.

• If you are a Canadian citizen who had travelled to another country during the outbreak and are currently outside of Canada, come home now while there are still commercial flights available.

• It is mandatory that anyone arriving in British Columbia from outside of Canada self-isolate and monitor for symptoms for 14 days upon their arrival. Spot checks will be conducted by the Government of Canada to verify compliance.

• If any symptoms arise, limit your contact with other people and use the BC COVID-19 symptom and self-assessment tool online at: https://covid19.thrive.health/ to determine if you need to be tested.

• Canada also has active COVID-19 travel advisories for other countries and regions, go to Government of Canada for latest travel alerts at: https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices

29. What if my job requires me to travel between Canada and the U.S.?
• The federal Transport Minister Marc Garneau said certain kinds of workers who need to cross the Canada-U.S. border will be exempted from requirements to self-isolate.

• These include: airline, train and marine crews, truck drivers and other people whose professions require cross-border travel, these essential travels allow food, fuel and medicine to move between Canada and the U.S.

30. Can you get sick from touching a package from any area where COVID-19 has been reported?
• To our knowledge, no one has become ill from touching a package from a country where COVID-19 has been reported 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.