

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 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 shortness of breath.
- 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.
- **There are no confirmed or probable cases of the COVID-19 in Alberta at this time.**
- AHS and Alberta Health are prepared should COVID-19 arrive 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 shortness of breath** 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 Hubei province, China, and do not have symptoms?

- Travelers coming from Hubei province continue to be at increased risk for COVID-19 infection.
- We are aware of early evidence that COVID-19 can cause a range of mild to severe symptoms. It is possible that individuals will not recognize when they first develop symptoms, because the symptoms can be similar to a cold or flu.
- People can help limit any potential spread by self-isolating and limiting contact with others for 14 days.
- Learn more here <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

What about people who have recently been in mainland China, but not Hubei? And what about people who have visited one of the areas that have been included in Alberta's expanded testing (Hong Kong, Singapore, Iran, South Korea, Japan or Italy)? What should they do?

- Anyone who has been in mainland China outside of Hubei province or has visited any of the countries listed above in the previous 14 days should call Health Link (811) if they had either of the following exposures:
 - Had contact with someone with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19
 - Was in a health care facility where COVID-19 cases were diagnosed or treated
- Anyone who has been in these areas in the previous 14 days but was not in a health care facility and did not have contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 does not need to self-isolate. They should monitor themselves daily for 14 days after leaving China for symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath. At the first sign of symptoms, they should immediately self-isolate and call Health Link (811).

What should people do if they were in contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a country other than mainland China?

- Anyone who was in contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days, regardless of which country they were in, is asked to limit contact with others (self-isolation, stay at home) for 14 days after the contact and call Health Link (811) to receive additional advice.
- **Further information for travelers returning to work and school:** <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#toc-5>

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 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 travelers 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 in a country other than mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Iran, South Korea, Japan or Italy where COVID-19 cases were diagnosed or treated, but they were NOT in close contact with a case?

- If people were in a country outside of these areas and 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 leaving the area for symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath. At the first sign of symptoms, they should immediately self-isolate and call Health Link.
- **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.
- Travelers should consider postponing travel to Iran, Northern Italy, and South Korea due to unknown or sustained community spread of COVID-19.
- Travelers 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-notices> 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 travelers.
- You can protect yourself by washing your hands often and well, and getting your annual influenza vaccine.
- Returning travelers on international flights may be screened at the airport.
- If any cases are diagnosed among travelers 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](#)