



COVID-19

Public Health Key Messages for Spokespersons

Last Updated: March 19, 2020

ABOUT COVID-193

RISK TO CANADIANS.....4

PROTECTING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS.....5

ADVICE FOR INDIVIDUALS (PREVENT SPREAD, PREPARE & SOCIAL DISTANCING)6

SELF-MONITORING, SELF-ISOLATION AND ISOLATION8

USE OF MASKS.....9

TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF CANADA10

TRAVELLERS ENTERING CANADA (SELF-ISOLATION)11

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE12

THE FEDERAL ROLE.....13

RESEARCH.....14

NATIONAL EMERGENCY STRATEGIC STOCKPILE.....15

HEALTH CARE PREPAREDNESS.....16

TESTING17

SURVEILLANCE.....18

TREATMENTS.....19

VACCINE20

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH21

About COVID-19

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. 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).
- Coronaviruses are usually spread by respiratory droplets left behind after someone coughs or sneezes.
- The most common symptoms of the illness caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) are:
 - fever
 - cough
 - difficulty breathing
- Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. This is the longest known infectious period for this disease.
- COVID-19 causes a range of illness, from mild to severe.
- Canadians aged 65 and over, and those of all ages with compromised immune systems or underlying medical conditions, are at an increased risk of more severe illness.
- Coronavirus infections are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and are confirmed through laboratory tests.
- There is currently no vaccine or treatment for .

Risk to Canadians

- COVID-19 is a serious health threat, and the situation is evolving daily.
- We are seeing an increasing number of cases in Canada and a number of provinces have reported cases with no links to travel. This is signal that there is some degree of community spread in Canada.
- Given the increasing number of cases and signs of community transmission, the risk to Canadians is considered high.
- This **does not mean** that all Canadians will get the disease.
- **It means** that there is a significant impact on the health care system already that could impact health care resources available to Canadians with or without COVID-19, if we do not flatten the epidemic curve now.
- The risk of severe illness and outcomes is higher for older adults and those of all ages with underlying medical conditions.
- This is why we are advising Canadians to stay home, if possible. If you must leave your home, practise social distancing.
- Public health authorities across the country are working hard to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and to reduce its impact.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada, along with provincial, territorial and community partners, continues to reassess the public health risk, based on the best available evidence as the situation evolves.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada, along with provincial, territorial and community partners, continues to reassess the public health risk, based on the best available evidence as the situation evolves.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

- We are calling on all Canadians to help protect older adults and medically vulnerable people who are at greatest risk of severe COVID-19 disease.
- We need to help as many Canadians as possible to stay healthy.
- This is why we are advising Canadians to stay home, if possible. If you must leave your home, practise social distancing.
- It is up to all of us to slow the spread of this virus and protect the most vulnerable in our communities.
- If you have travelled outside of Canada within the past 14 days, self-isolate at home and stay away from those who are most at risk, even if you do not have any symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing).
- Health workers should absolutely not go to work if they have symptoms because they have direct contact with the most vulnerable of our society who are at highest risk of severe illness.
- No one who has symptoms, even mild ones, should visit an assisted living, long-term care or health care facility, unless you are seeking medical attention.
- If you are seeking medical attention, call ahead so that appropriate measures can be taken when you arrive.

Advice for Individuals (prevent spread, prepare & social distancing)

- We are advising Canadians to stay home, if possible. If you must leave your home, practise social distancing.
- Social distancing is proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak.
- You can practise social distancing by making changes in your everyday routines to minimize close contact with others. For example:
 - increase social distance with others to two arm lengths (or approximately two metres);
 - avoid crowded places;
 - shop and use public transit during off-peak hours; and
 - greet one another with a wave or elbow bump instead of a handshake, kiss or hug.
- To stay healthy and prevent the spread of respiratory and other illnesses is to:
 - wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
 - cough and sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands;
 - avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, especially with unwashed hands;
 - avoid close contact with people who are sick; and
 - stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others.
- There are simple, practical things you can do to prepare in case you or someone in your household becomes ill or if COVID-19 becomes common in your community.
-
- Make a plan that includes:

- **Essential supplies** (a few weeks' worth) on hand so you will not need to leave your home if you become ill.
 - Avoid panic buying. Add a few extra items to your cart every time you shop. This places less of a burden on suppliers, and can help ease financial burden on you as well.
 - Renew and refill your prescription medications.

- **Alternative arrangements** in case you become ill or if you need to care for a sick family member. For example:
 - Have backup childcare in case you or your usual care provider become ill.
 - If you care for dependents, have a backup caregiver in place.
 - Talk to your employer about working from home if possible.

- If you have symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing) and suspect you may have COVID-19, contact a health professional before arriving in person so that the appropriate measures can be taken when you arrive.

- **Stay informed.** Go to credible sources for up-to-date information and advice:
 - the [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus) web page;
 - the national toll-free phone number (1-833-784-4397) for COVID-19;
 - Government of Canada Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn social media accounts; and
 - provincial, territorial and municipal government websites and social media accounts.

Self-monitoring, Self-isolation and Isolation

- **Self-monitor** for symptoms (fever, cough or difficulty breathing) if:
 - you have reason to believe you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19;
 - you are in close contact with older adults or medically vulnerable persons; or
 - you have been advised to self-monitor for any other reason by your local public health authority.
- **Self-isolate** at home for 14 days, and self-monitor for symptoms, if:
 - you have travelled anywhere outside of Canada within the last 14 days; or
 - your local public health authority has identified you as a close contact of someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- **Isolate** at home, and remain in isolation until your local public health authority advises otherwise, if:
 - you have been diagnosed with COVID-19;
 - you are being assessed by public health for COVID-19 and/or are waiting to hear the results of a laboratory test for COVID-19; or
 - you have been advised to isolate at home for any other reason by your local public health authority.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough or difficulty breathing) no matter how mild, stay home, call your health care provider or local public health authority, and follow their instructions.
- Do not go to a health care provider without calling ahead so that appropriate measures can be taken when you arrive.
-

Use of Masks

- If you are a healthy individual, the use of a mask is not necessary.
- However, if you are experiencing symptoms of an illness that spreads through the air, wearing a mask can help prevent the spread of the infection to others. The mask acts as a barrier and helps stop the tiny droplets from spreading around you when you cough or sneeze.
- Your health provider may recommend you wear a mask while you are seeking or waiting for care. In these instances, masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures put in place so that people with an infectious respiratory illness do not transmit the infection to others.
- If you are caring for a sick person or you are in direct contact with an ill person, wearing a mask can help protect you from catching the virus, but it will not fully eliminate the risk of illness.
- When wearing a mask, make sure to:
 - properly cover your mouth and nose;
 - avoid touching the mask once it's on your face;
 - properly discard the mask after each use; and
 - wash your hands after removing the mask.

Travel Outside of Canada

- We are asking Canadians to stay at home.
- Canadians who have travelled outside of Canada should return as quickly as possible.
- This is especially important for older adults and people with underlying medical conditions who are at a higher risk of developing severe illness.
- It is important that Canadians who travel internationally be aware that they could be subject to quarantine measures in other countries and may have reduced access to quality health care.

Travellers Entering Canada (self-isolation)

- Federal, provincial and territorial public health leaders recommend that all travellers from outside of Canada self-isolate for 14-days.
- These efforts will help to slow the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in Canada.
- At the same time, the continued global movement of goods and the ongoing delivery of essential services will be important for Canada's response to COVID-19.
- An exemption to the request to self-isolate for 14 days should be provided to workers who are essential to the movement of goods and people, such as:
 - healthy workers in the trade and transportation sector who are important for the movement of goods and people across the border, such as truck drivers and crew on any plane, train or marine vessel crossing the border
 - healthy people who have to cross the border to go to work, including health care providers and critical infrastructure workers
- Workers in these sectors should:
 - practise social distancing (maintain a distance of 2 metres from others);
 - closely self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms (checking for cough, fever or shortness of breath); and
 - self-isolate should they exhibit any symptoms.
- Employers in these sectors should conduct active daily monitoring of their staff for COVID-19 symptoms.

Federal Funding for COVID-19 Response

- On March 11, the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, announced Canada's more than \$1- billion whole-of-government COVID-19 Response Fund.
- Funding provided to PHAC and Health Canada includes:
 - \$50 million for the Public Health Agency of Canada to support ongoing communications to keep Canadians informed and a national public education campaign to encourage the adoption of personal protective behaviours.
 - \$100 million to support federal public health measures such as enhanced surveillance, increased testing at the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) and ongoing support for preparedness in First Nations and Inuit communities.
 - This is in addition to an initial \$50 million that was provided to support the immediate public health response.
 - \$275 million to enhance our capacity to explore antivirals, develop vaccines and support clinical trials.
 - This is in addition to the \$27 million for coronavirus research announced in early March through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which will support 47 research teams from across Canada.
 - \$50 million to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support the purchase of personal protective equipment—such as surgical masks, face shields and gowns—and medical supplies to address federal needs and supplement stocks of the provinces and territories that require it.

The Federal Role

- The Government of Canada is responsible for providing health services, medications, supplies and equipment for specified federal populations and employees who normally access federally operated health care services.
- The Government of Canada facilitates access to surge capacity, including from federal programs, employees and resources, to support provincial and territorial responses if required.
- This includes mobilizing medical supplies in the Public Health Agency of Canada's National Emergency Strategic Stockpile, working with provinces and territories to identify supply vulnerabilities, and acquiring extra medical supplies through Public Services and Procurement Canada and other federal agencies as appropriate.
- The Government of Canada will also develop pan-Canadian guidance on ethical allocation and prioritization of resources, develop procurement strategies for critical items in short supply and work with domestic suppliers to anticipate and reply to capacity shortages.
- Should a COVID-19 vaccine become available, the Government of Canada would help provinces and territories to secure timely access to safe and adequate supplies on behalf of Canadians.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada continues to closely monitor the evolving situation and to update our response and our planning based on the best available evidence.

Research

- The Government of Canada is investing in Canadian researchers to learn more about COVID-19 and to develop tools and resources to combat it.
- The \$1 billion whole-of-government COVID-19 Response Fund includes \$275 million to enhance our capacity to explore antivirals, develop vaccines and support clinical trials.
- Through Government of Canada funding, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is supporting 96 research projects across the country that will focus on developing and implementing measures to rapidly detect, manage, and reduce the transmission of COVID-19.
- The projects are funded through an initial investment of \$27 million in early March to support 47 research projects, and an additional \$25 million to support 49 more projects from the Government of Canada COVID-19 Response Fund.
- The Government of Canada will also continue working with international health regulators—including the European Medicines Agency and the United States Food and Drug Administration—to support and coordinate rapid regulatory responses for potential vaccines and other medical countermeasures.
- Health Canada encourages companies and researchers with drugs that could be effective in the treatment of COVID-19 to contact the Department. Clinical trials can be authorized and established very quickly, particularly in urgent circumstances.

National Emergency Strategic Stockpile

- Canada's National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) contains supplies that provinces and territories can request in emergencies, such as infectious disease outbreaks, natural disasters and other public health events, when their own resources are not enough.
- These supplies include a variety of items such as medical equipment and supplies, pharmaceuticals, and social service supplies, such as beds and blankets.
- Provinces and territories are responsible for preparing and maintaining their own supply capacities.
- The purpose of the NESS is to help supplement provincial and territorial resources during a rare or high-impact public health event.

Health Care Preparedness

- Each province and territory is responsible for ensuring that pandemic plans (or all-hazard plans depending on the jurisdiction) are developed, tested and periodically updated.
- Each province or territory has established protocols and guidelines for prioritizing health care services during times of high service demand as well as staff or supply shortages in their respective jurisdictions.
- Provinces and territories are responsible for ensuring that medications, supplies and equipment required for the provision of pandemic health care services are ready and available.
- Each jurisdiction is also responsible for communicating and engaging regularly with their citizens, media and stakeholder groups about their respective plans.

Testing

- The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg is performing diagnostic testing for the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Multiple provincial public health laboratories can now also test for COVID-19.
- Testing in Canada is focused on people who present with symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Most individuals tested to date have had symptoms and a history of travel outside Canada, or contact with a traveller.
- In addition, we are expanding testing for people without travel history by including testing of COVID-19 for patients who are already being tested for other respiratory viruses.

Why asymptomatic people are not being tested for COVID-19:

- It is important to focus on testing the right people at the right time.
- Testing people who are asymptomatic is not considered an effective approach to detecting and preventing the spread of this virus and may give a false sense of reassurance.

Surveillance

- We are placing a priority on expanding surveillance in Canada to increase our ability to detect cases that could signify possible community spread, and assist public health authorities in taking rapid and targeted action to interrupt spread and delay and reduce the impact of COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Canada has a highly integrated federal, provincial and territorial approach to surveillance, involving front-line health care settings and laboratories across the country that have effectively equipped us to detect respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.
- Public health laboratories across Canada are also working together to report COVID-19 test results weekly.
- These reports allow us to monitor where COVID-19 is occurring, which can provide us with an early signal of potential clusters that could indicate community spread.
- Canada also has established networks of pediatricians and family doctors, who are essential to surveillance.
- These networks include providers at the front line of primary care, who are often the first to detect new or unexpected patterns of illness that may be a first alert to an emerging health concern.
- It is by bringing data together from all these sources that we can detect signals and investigate transmission patterns to closely monitor the potential emergence and spread of COVID-19 in communities across Canada.

Treatments

- At this time, there is no specific drug or medication to treat people who have COVID-19.
- Researchers are looking at the effectiveness of existing antiviral treatments.
- Patients are treated with available medications to manage their symptoms and prevent complications.

Vaccine

- Currently, there is no approved vaccine that protects against coronaviruses in humans.
- The World Health Organization (WHO), along with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, is coordinating international collaboration to help advance research and vaccine development for COVID-19.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research—in consultation with international partners, including the WHO and the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness—are assessing how scientists at our National Microbiology Laboratory, along with the broader Canadian research community, will participate in the global research efforts.

Public Communications and Outreach

- Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of Canada has provided Canadians and health care providers with the timely, trusted, accessible, evidence-informed information they require to protect themselves, their families, their communities and businesses.
- This includes:
 - [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus), a Government of Canada website dedicated to providing the latest information on COVID-19;
 - a toll-free information line (1-833-784-4397);
 - sustained social media campaigns to provide information and updates to Canadians as well as general awareness and prevention messaging;
 - digital advertising to promote infection prevention tips and travel advice, which directs readers to [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus);
 - regular updates to the media;
 - airport and border signage and handouts for travellers; and
 - coordinated public health messaging with provincial and territorial partners and intermediaries.