



Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks

[Outbreak update](#)

[Symptoms and treatment](#)

[Prevention and risks](#)

[Being prepared](#)

[For health professionals](#)

[Canada's response](#)

[Travel advice](#)

[Awareness resources](#)

[Guidance documents](#)

On this page

- [How coronavirus spreads](#)
- [Difference between self monitor, self isolate and isolate](#)
- [Preventing coronavirus](#)
- [Risks of getting coronavirus](#)
- [False and misleading claims](#)

How coronavirus spreads

Human coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person through:

- respiratory droplets generated when you cough or sneeze
- close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

Current evidence suggests person-to-person spread is efficient when there is close contact.

Difference between self-monitor, self-isolate and isolate

There is a difference between [advice to self-monitor](#), [advice to self-isolate](#) and [advice to isolate](#). It is important to note these measures are in place to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

▶ **Self-monitor**

▶ **Self-isolate**

▶ **Isolate**

Preventing coronavirus

Canadians should continue to think ahead about the actions that they can take to stay healthy and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Canada, including:

- [being prepared](#) in case you or a family member become ill

- following the latest [travel advice](#) from federal and provincial public health leaders:
 - [avoiding all non-essential travel](#), including [cruise ships](#)
 - self-isolating, and monitoring for symptoms (cough, fever or difficulty breathing) for 14 days if you have travelled outside of Canada
- reducing contact with others by following the guidance for [self-monitoring, self-isolating, or isolating](#)
- practicing [social distancing](#) and [proper hygiene](#)
- [wearing masks](#), if necessary

Think you might have COVID-19?

Take a self-assessment

Social distancing

Together, we can slow the spread of COVID-19 by making a conscious effort to keep a physical distance between each other. [Social distancing](#) is proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak.

This means making changes in your everyday routines to minimize close contact with others, including:

- avoiding crowded places and non-essential gatherings
- avoiding common greetings, such as handshakes
- limiting contact with people at higher risk like older adults and those in poor health
- keeping a distance of at least 2 arms-length (approximately 2 metres) from others

Hygiene

Proper hygiene can help reduce the risk of infection or spreading infection to others:

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the washroom and when preparing food
 - use alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) if soap and water are not available
- when coughing or sneezing:
 - cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm, not your hand
 - dispose of any tissues you have used as soon as possible in a lined waste basket and wash your hands afterwards
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands

Cleaning

Health Canada has published a [list of hard surface disinfectants](#) that are likely to be effective for use against coronavirus (COVID-19).

Although they do not claim to kill viruses such as COVID-19, cleaners can play a role in helping limit the transfer of microorganisms. Health Canada recommends cleaning often, using either regular household cleaners or diluted bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) the following high-touch surfaces:

- toys
- toilets
- phones
- electronics
- door handles

- bedside tables
- television remotes

Wearing masks

If you are a healthy individual, the use of a mask is not recommended for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Wearing a mask when you are not ill may give a false sense of security. There is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use and disposal. They also need to be changed frequently.

However, your health care provider may recommend you wear a mask if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 while you are seeking or waiting for care. In this instance, masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures. The mask acts as a barrier and helps stop the tiny droplets from spreading you when you cough or sneeze.

Risks of getting coronavirus

COVID-19 is a serious health threat, and the situation is evolving daily. The risk will vary between and within communities, but given the increasing number of cases in Canada, the risk to Canadians is considered **high**.

This does not mean that all Canadians will get the disease. It means that there is already a significant impact on our health care system. If we do not flatten the epidemic curve now, the increase of COVID-19 cases could impact health care resources available to Canadians.

The risk for COVID-19 may be increased for certain settings such as:

- cruise ships
- crowded areas (such as public transit and shopping centres)
- gatherings (spiritual and cultural settings, theatres, sports arenas, festivals and conferences)

There is an increased risk of more severe outcomes for Canadians:

- aged 65 and over
- with compromised immune systems
- with underlying medical conditions

People that fall into these categories should reconsider attending gatherings. This includes large gatherings and even smaller events in crowded or enclosed settings.

If you have symptoms (cough, fever or difficulty breathing), do not attend a mass gathering, event or places where people gather. You could put someone whose health is vulnerable at risk.

Travellers

The risk for getting COVID-19 may be increased for travellers. Canadians are advised to avoid all non-essential travel. If you must travel, check the latest travel advice before you leave.

We will continue to adapt our risk assessment based on the latest data available.

Pregnant women

Throughout pregnancy, women experience changes in their bodies that may increase the risk of some illnesses, including viral respiratory infections, such as the flu. At this time, there is **insufficient evidence** to suggest that pregnant women are at a greater risk for more serious outcomes related to COVID-19.

It is always important for pregnant women to protect themselves from illnesses and take the appropriate steps to avoid and prevent infection. [Proper hygiene](#) can help reduce the risk of getting an infection or spreading infection to others.

If you are pregnant and concerned about COVID-19, speak to your health care provider.

Survival of coronaviruses on surfaces

It is not certain how long COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Preliminary information on COVID-19 suggests that the virus may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days depending on different conditions, such as:

- temperature
- type of surface
- humidity of the environment

Surfaces frequently touched with hands are most likely to be contaminated, including:

- tables
- handrails
- doorknobs
- electronics
- countertops
- light switches
- faucet handles
- cabinet handles
- elevator buttons

Products shipped within or from outside of Canada could also be contaminated. However, because parcels generally take days or weeks to be delivered, and are shipped at room temperature, the risk of spread is **low**. There is no known risk of coronaviruses entering Canada on parcels or packages.

To protect yourself from COVID-19, make sure to do the following when handling products shipped within or outside of Canada:

- use good [hygiene measures](#)
- [regularly clean and disinfect surfaces](#)
- do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth

Food

There is currently no evidence to suggest that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus and there are currently no reported cases of COVID 19 transmission through food. People are unlikely to be infected with the virus through food.

Scientists and food safety authorities across the world are closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19.

If we become aware of a potential food safety risk, appropriate actions will be taken to ensure the safety of Canada's food supply.

Coronaviruses are killed by [common cleaning and disinfection methods](#) and by cooking food to [safe internal temperatures](#).

Learn more about [food safety](#).

Animals in Canada

The current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human-to-human transmission. There is no evidence to suggest that pets or other animals play a role in transmitting the disease to humans. Scientists are still trying to understand if and how it affects animals.

Pets can contribute to our overall happiness and well-being, especially in times of stress. If you are feeling well (no symptoms of COVID-19) and are not self-isolating because of COVID-19 illness, you can continue to take walks with your dog or spend time with your pet. This can contribute to keeping both you and your pet healthy.

As a precautionary measure, if you have COVID-19 symptoms or are self-isolating due to contact with a COVID-19 case, you should follow similar recommendations around animals, as you would around people in these circumstances:

- avoid close contact with animals during your illness
 - practise good handwashing and avoid coughing and sneezing on your animals
 - do not visit farms or have contact with livestock
- if possible, have another member of your household care for your animals
 - if this is not possible, always wash your hands before and after touching animals, their food and supplies and practise good cough and sneezing etiquette
- limit your animal's contact with other people and animals outside the household until your illness is resolved

These measures are recommended as a precaution, and are basic practices to prevent transmission of diseases between humans and animals. If you have concerns, seek professional advice from your veterinarian or a public health professional who can help to answer your questions.

The [Canadian Food Inspection Agency website](#) has more information about animals and COVID-19.

False and misleading claims

We have not approved any product to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19. Selling unauthorized health products or making false or misleading claims to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19 is illegal in Canada. We take this matter very seriously and we are taking action to stop this activity.

We have also not approved any disinfectant products with claims specific to COVID-19. However, authorized disinfectant products can make a claim of broad spectrum of activity against viruses if they meet specific evidence standards. We are working with companies and we will publish a list of disinfectant products that can make this claim to help Canadians make effective choices.

We encourage anyone who has information regarding potential non-compliant sale or advertising of any health product claiming to treat, prevent or cure COVID-19, to report it using our [online complaint form](#).

Related links

- [Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 global outbreak](#)
- [Sickness or injury while abroad](#)
- [Travel health notices](#)
- [Health and safety in the workplace](#)
- [EI sickness benefits](#)
- [Approved hard surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers](#)

Date modified:

2020-03-26

× COVID-19 Virtual
Assistant