



Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

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What is coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?

Human coronaviruses are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold.

The new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a virus producing mild to severe respiratory infections. At this time, most infections are among people who live in Hubei Province in China however there are over 87 countries are reporting confirmed cases of COVID-19 of which some are reporting community transmission. Therefore the risk of transmission is no longer just in China. It is important that we prepare for the possibility that the virus could spread further.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure. Many people are presenting with cold or flu-like symptoms such as:

- Fever, or
- Cough.

Severe cases may have:

- Difficulty breathing, and/or
- Pneumonia

Individuals with fever, cough and/or difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

Risk of severe disease may be higher for:

- Older adults
- People with chronic disease (for example: diabetes, cancer, heart, renal, or chronic lung disease)
- Those with weakened immune systems

What should I do if I have symptoms of COVID-19?

If you are experiencing symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath contact your health care provider (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/hospitals-and-health-centres). Describe your symptoms over the phone before your appointment so the clinic can arrange to see you without exposing others. Let them know if you have travelled in the last 14 days or been exposed to someone that has travelled during that time.

If your symptoms become severe call 9-1-1.

Are there other respiratory illnesses I should worry about?

There are a number of respiratory infections currently circulating in the Northwest Territories, which can also produce similar symptoms, including:

- Pertussis (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/pertussis-whooping-cough)
- Influenza (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/influenza-flu)
- Common cold (www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cold-flu-know-difference-fact-sheet.html)

Is there a treatment for COVID-19?

Right now, there is no specific treatment for most people with COVID-19. Your health care provider may recommend steps you can take to relieve symptoms or provide other care.

Are antibiotics and antivirals effective in preventing or treating COVID-19?

Antibiotics work on infections caused by bacteria. COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so antibiotics will not help. Antibiotics help in other bacterial lung infections and antivirals may improve influenza infections but are not effective for COVID-19. Both Antibiotics and antivirals should only be used as directed by a health care professional.

Is there a vaccine to protect against COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19.

Will this year's flu vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

The flu vaccine does not protect against COVID-19. However, influenza is still in the NWT. The influenza vaccine is safe and effective. We recommend getting your vaccination to prevent the spread of influenza and reduce your chance of being hospitalized.

How does COVID-19 spread?

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

- Respiratory droplets that spread when you cough or sneeze,
- Close, personal contact,

- Touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands,
- In rare circumstances, they have found the virus in stool.
- A close contact is :
 - a person who provided care for the person with COVID-19, including family, or other caregivers, and healthcare workers who did not use protective equipment; or
 - a person who lived with or otherwise had close contact (within 2 metres) with the person with COVID-19 while they were sick; or
 - a person who had direct contact with bodily fluids of the sick person (e.g. was coughed or sneezed on).

Can COVID-19 be transmitted when a person is not having symptoms?

This question is currently under investigation. Experts believe that, by far, most spread occurs when a person has symptoms.

How can I protect myself and my community from COVID-19?

We can reduce the spread of respiratory infections (this includes COVID-19), in our communities by practicing healthy respiratory practices (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/healthy-respiratory-practices.pdf). This means you and your family should:

1. **STAY HOME** if you are sick
 - Wear a mask if you are sick and must go out especially if you are in a waiting room or in places with large crowds.
 - If you need to see your healthcare provider ask for a mask when you get there
2. **Avoid close contact** with others if you are sick
3. **Turn and cover your nose/mouth** with a disposable tissue for every cough/sneeze
 - If a tissue is not available cough/sneeze into your elbow
4. **Throw used tissues in the garbage**
 - If there is no garbage, carry a small plastic bag to put used tissues in and throw out later
5. **Wash your hands** (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/handwashinginfographicbig-web.pdf) for at least 20 seconds after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose

- Use alcohol-based sanitizer if no soap is immediately available
6. **Clean/Disinfect any surfaces or objects** you or someone else might have touched while sick

Here is a video from the World Health Organization on practices to protect your health:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPITHEiFWLc

Should I be preparing in case I or a close family member gets sick?

The global situation is changing rapidly. The risk of acquiring COVID-19 in NWT remains low at present. It is important to prepare in case you or a family member get sick. This may include establishing supplies of food or medications. Below are some recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada:

1. Make a plan

If COVID-19 becomes common in your community, you should plan on ways to reduce the risk of infection.

Your plan should include how you can change your regular habits to reduce your exposure to crowded places. For example, you may:

- do your grocery shopping at off-peak hours
- commute by public transit outside of the busy rush hour
- spend time outdoors or on the land if possible

Your plan should also include what you will do if you become sick. If you are a caregiver of children or other dependents, you will want to have backup caregivers.

You should also think about what you will do if a member of your family becomes sick and needs care. Talk to your employer about working from home if you are needed to care for a family member at home. If you, yourself, become ill, stay home until you are no longer showing symptoms.

Your plan should include shopping for supplies that you should have on hand at all times. This will ensure you do not need to leave your home while you are sick or busy caring for an ill family member.

Your plan should build on the kits you have prepared for other potential emergencies. For more information on how to prepare yourself and your family in the event of an emergency, please visit www.getprepared.ca.

2. Fill your prescriptions

Refill your prescriptions now so that you do not have to go to a busy pharmacy if you do become sick. Consider seeing your health care provider to renew your prescriptions ahead of time.

3. Stock up on essentials but avoid panic buying

At this time, it makes sense to fill your cupboards with non-perishable food items, so that you do not need to go shopping if you become sick.

It is easier on the supply chain if people gradually build up their household stores instead of making large-scale purchases all at once. To do this, you can add a few extra items to your grocery cart every time you shop. Good options are easy-to-prepare foods like:

- dried pasta and sauce
- prepared canned soups
- canned vegetables and beans

It is also a good idea to have extra stores of:

- pet food
- toilet paper
- facial tissue
- feminine hygiene products
- diapers (if you have children who use them)

The reason for storing extra items is not necessarily because you will need to self-isolate. Having these supplies on hand will ensure you do not need to leave your home at the peak of the outbreak or if you become ill.

For more information on being prepared, see:

- www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html (Government of Canada)

What does self-isolation mean?

A healthcare provider may advise you to self-isolate. Self-isolation means **limiting your contact with others**. In some situations even if you are feeling well. While on self-isolation you must self-monitor for signs and symptoms of illness such as cough, fever or shortness of breath.

Is there anything I should NOT be doing?

The following measures **ARE NOT** effective against COVID-2019:

- Wearing multiple masks (especially if you are not sick)
- Taking self-medication such as antibiotics

Smoking is harmful. Even decreasing the amount you smoke lowers the risk and reduces the severity of respiratory infections. If you would like help to quit smoking, visit:

- www.nwtquitline.ca

Should I wear a mask to protect myself from COVID-19?

If you are a healthy individual the use of a mask is not needed. Wearing a mask when you are not ill and are not at high risk for developing symptoms may give a false sense of security.

Masks act as a barrier and help stop the tiny droplets from spreading around you when you cough or sneeze. Wearing a mask is appropriate if:

- you have symptoms of an illness that spreads through the air. Wearing a mask can help stop the spread of the infection to others.
- your health provider may recommend you wear a mask while you are seeking or waiting for care. In this case, masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures that are put in place so that people with an infectious respiratory illness do not spread the infection to others.
- you are caring for a sick person or you are in direct contact with an ill person. In this situation wearing a mask can help protect you from catching COVID-19, however, it will not fully eliminate the risk of illness.

Here is a video from the World Health Organization explaining when to wear a mask:

How do I wear a mask properly?

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
- wash your hands after removing the mask

Masks can easily become contaminated and need to be changed frequently and fitted properly for them to provide adequate protection.

This video demonstrates the proper use of a mask:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ded_AxFfJoQ

Information for Travellers

If you or your family member have travelled outside of NWT within the last 14 days, the NWT Chief Public Health Officer advises that you:

- **Follow the healthy respiratory practices** outlined above.
- **Monitor yourself for symptoms.** If you develop fever, cough or difficulty breathing contact a local healthcare provider (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/hospitals-and-health-centres). If your symptoms are severe call 911. It is best to call in advance and tell the local healthcare provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers.
- **If you feel unwell avoid close contact with others.**

Information for International Travellers or Returning Canadians who travel from Hubei Province or Iran

In collaboration with federal and provincial partners, the NWT Chief Public Health Officer advises that, if you visited **China's Hubei province or Iran** within the last 14 days you should isolate yourself for 14 days upon your return. This is precautionary and we advise self-isolation even if you are feeling well. If you develop fever, cough or difficulty breathing, contact the local healthcare provider (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/hospitals-and-health-centres). If your symptoms are severe call 9-1-1. It is best to call in advance and tell the local healthcare provider of your recent travel. See above for more information on self-isolation.

What do you do if you become sick or think you may have been exposed to COVID-19 or another disease while traveling?

If you have been travelling in the past 14 days and you are sick you should tell a health care provider (www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/hospitals-and-health-centres). You should also tell a health care provider if you become ill after contact with someone who has travelled (particularly if that person has been ill). If you seek health care, wear a mask or ask for one when you get there.

Let your healthcare provider know:

- Your symptoms and when they started;
- Where you have been travelling or living;
- If you became sick while travelling or have become sick since returning home;

- If you have been in close contact with someone who is sick and was travelling; and
- If you have other exposures that concern you (e.g. laboratory or animal exposures)

What should you do if you have travel plans?

Stay up-to-date with the Government of Canada travel alerts (<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>).

Take the appropriate preventive measures, such as:

- Washing your hands regularly;
- Avoid contact with animals (alive or dead);
- Avoid surfaces with animal droppings or secretions on them;
- Avoid contact with sick people, especially if they have fever, cough, or difficulty breathing; and
- Be aware of the local situation and follow local public health advice.

What is the test for COVID-19?

Currently, the test for COVID-19 is the same sample collection test used for other respiratory viruses such as influenza. It is called a nasopharyngeal swab. The health care provider has the patient put their head back and inserts a flexible flocked swab into the back of the nose to collect the specimen. The tip of the swab is placed in a special liquid for transport and then sent to the laboratory for testing. Here is a picture of the collection kit:



Where is the test for COVID-19 done?

In the NWT COVID-19 swabs, are sent to ProvLab-Alberta Precision Laboratories (ProvLab-APL) in Edmonton, Alberta. ProvLab-APL follows federal guidance regarding the new coronavirus by submitting the specimen for confirmatory testing to the Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

How long does it take to get the results of a COVID-19 test?

The ProVLab-APL has informed us that they can usually provide the health care provider a presumptive or preliminary result within 4 days, and it will likely take an additional 3 days (7 days in total) to get the confirmatory result from the National Microbiology Laboratory.

What is the procedure if someone tests positive for COVID-19 in the NWT?

NWT health care providers would follow direction of the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer if someone tests positive for COVID-19. This direction adopts the latest national public health management guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

What is the Government of Canada/NWT doing to prevent the spread?

The Government of Canada and the provinces and territories have multiple systems in place to identify, prevent and control the spread of serious infectious diseases into and within Canada.

These systems are on alert to ensure that Canada maintains continual preparedness for public health emergencies, taking precautions to prevent the introduction into and spread of communicable diseases in and out of Canada. These precautions include:

- Actively monitoring the situation with COVID-19, together with national and international groups, to be ready for identifying and caring for those who have COVID-19 and to prevent its spread;
- Routine infection and prevention control precautions in all Canadian hospitals;
- Routine traveller screening procedures at Canada's ports of entry; and
- Public health laboratory capacity that is well equipped to rapidly detect serious infectious diseases.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is continuing to collaborate with partners internationally. It is also sharing information and working with federal, provincial and territorial partners and public health authorities to maintain Canada's preparedness to rapidly identify, treat and prevent the spread of this emerging disease should it present in Canada.

Is the Chief Public Health Officer recommending cancelation of large gatherings or events?

At this time the Chief Public Health Officer is advising NWT organizers of events and gatherings to assess and include planning for COVID-19 in their preparations. The situation is evolving, and the CPHO may direct actions to protect the health and safety of NWT residents that could include the cancellation or modification of events and gatherings. The CPHO also recommends those hosting gatherings to clean

and disinfect all regularly touched surfaces and make hand washing and respiratory supplies readily available.

Why did the name change from novel coronavirus (nCoV-2019) to coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?

The decision was based on guidelines agreed between World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation. The illness is called COVID-19 and the virus causing COVID-19 is called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

Where can I find the most up-to-date information on this outbreak?

The global situation is changing rapidly. The risk of acquiring COVID-19 in NWT remains low at present. For the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 see the Government of Canada website (www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html). This is an evolving situation, and we will provide NWT residents with new information as it becomes available.