What we know about COVID-19

COVID-19 is a viral infection that mainly affects the lungs, but it can also cause damage to other organs. Some people can get very sick with COVID-19 and may require hospitalization or get long-lasting symptoms including feeling tired, trouble breathing, trouble concentrating or muscle aches.

Viruses often mutate and change, creating new variants. COVID-19 variants can spread more easily and cause more serious disease.

Steps to keep everyone safe

- Get the COVID-19 vaccine, including a booster dose when eligible. Vaccines even work against variants.
- Stay home and self-isolate if you are feeling unwell. Get tested, if eligible.
- Keep a physical distance from others, as much as possible.
- Keep gatherings outdoors, as much as possible.
- Wear a [face mask](#) where and when required, such as in higher risk indoor settings. Consider wearing a mask in crowded indoor places with poor ventilation.
- Wash your hands or use alcohol-based sanitizer often.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

COVID-19 vaccination

COVID-19 vaccines available in Canada are safe and effective, including for people with health conditions, weakened immune systems, auto-immune disorders and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Being fully vaccinated, plus a booster when eligible, reduces the risk of getting, spreading and becoming seriously sick from COVID-19 and variants. Everyone is strongly encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Learn more about [COVID-19 vaccines](#).

Transmission & Ventilation

COVID-19 is spread by respiratory droplets and aerosols, most often from close contact with an infected person, such as:

- sharing hugs and kisses
- gathering closely with other people
- in crowded indoor spaces
- touching your mouth, nose or eyes after touching surfaces with the virus

Good air flow can help reduce the spread of COVID-19. To ensure good air flow:

- Open windows and doors, if it is safe and possible.
- Keep your heating and air conditioning systems well maintained.
- Use the highest efficiency filter that is compatible with your furnace, air conditioner, etc.
- When using ceiling or portable fans, use upward airflow rotation.
- Keep the area around air vents clear of furniture, etc.

Using portable air cleaners in indoor spaces helps reduce virus particles in the air. Make sure that the air cleaner keeps running and does not blow directly at anyone. Proper filters should be used and changed regularly.

COVID-19 is not known to spread through the air over long distances, through ventilation systems or through food or water. Learn more about COVID-19 transmission, aerosols and ventilation.

COVID-19 Symptoms

Common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, trouble swallowing, sore throat, runny nose, loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and difficulty breathing. Symptoms can appear up to 14 days after having close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Older adults and children may also have symptoms such as chills, headaches, sleeping more than usual, feeling disoriented, confusion, muscle aches, dizziness, weakness, or falls.

Older adults and people with health conditions are at greater risk for serious illness, requiring hospital care. In very rare cases, some children can get an unusual inflammatory condition. Seek medical attention right away if a child's symptoms are not improving or they get a rash, long lasting fever, pink eyes and/or swelling in the hands and feet.

What to do if you have symptoms

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, self-isolate and visit COVID-19: What to Do if You Have COVID-19 Symptoms for information on what to do next. Get tested for COVID-19, if eligible.

Self-isolation means staying home and away from others, including people in your household. Do not go outside, to public places, or use public transit. Shop online or call a friend to pick up supplies for you. Call your health care provider if you need help with any symptoms. Call 911 if you or someone else is having difficulty breathing. If you are unable to safely self-isolate in your own home because of lack of space, or because you live with people with underlying health conditions, you may be eligible for support at the Toronto Voluntary Isolation Centre.

More information

Visit our website at toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.