

Diseases, Disorders and Injuries

Coronavirus

On this page

[What is a coronavirus?](#)

[What is the current status of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)?](#)

[What can workplace management do?](#)

[How does a coronavirus spread?](#)

[What is meant by “close contact”?](#)

[What are the symptoms of infection with COVID-19?](#)

[Which occupations are at risk?](#)

[What are the recommendations to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus?](#)

[What are measures that can be taken in workplaces that provide health care?](#)

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold.

A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The severe diseases have included:

- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) (first reported in 2012, all cases have been linked to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula)
- [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS-CoV)
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (now known as coronavirus disease or COVID-19)

Viruses can change over time. As the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) states:

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, will naturally develop mutations, which are changes to the genetic material in the virus over time. When there have been several significant mutations to the virus then it's called a variant. A variant is of concern when it affects:

- disease spread
 - disease severity (for example, whether you have mild symptoms or require hospital care)
 - tests used to detect the virus
 - protection from previous infections, vaccines, or treatments
-

What is the current status of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

This document will discuss general precautions a workplace can take to help lower the spread of coronaviruses. For updates on COVID-19 , please see:

- in Canada: Government of Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada) - [COVID-19: Current situation](#)
 - the USA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - [COVID-19](#)
 - for world reports: World Health Organization - [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
-

What can workplace management do?

Do everything possible, under the circumstances, to protect the health and safety of workers and customers by providing adequate information, education, training, cleaning and disinfecting, and recommending measures such as mask-wearing or personal protective equipment, as appropriate.

Workplaces should have a policy in place that outlines their requirements when people may be sick. This policy should indicate how to notify the workplace and if and when there is a requirement for a doctor's note. Organizations may wish to suspend the need for a doctor's or medical note for the absence to reduce the burden on the health care system.

During a pandemic, businesses may be asked to close or to operate using reduced staff (to promote physical distancing and reduce overcrowding) or to use low-contact methods. Allow workers to work remotely where possible. Assess each individual or job role to determine who or what tasks can be performed remotely.

Encourage proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette at all times.

Maintain or improve ventilation to reduce the build-up of respiratory particles. Work with a professional to make sure your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system is working properly. The HVAC system should have the appropriate filter, be suitable to the setting and activities, the number of occupants present, be suitable for how long the space is used, and be adjusted to exchange air as much as possible if needed.

Move activities outdoors where possible. If indoors, open windows or doors to introduce fresh air where possible (if weather permits and where safe to do so).

Screening methods such as checklists and temperature checks may be used when workers report to the workplace. Use a screening questionnaire from a public health agency, and remind workers to stay at home if they have symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild.

Pandemics often occur in waves, meaning periods of higher restrictive measures may tighten or loosen in response to local infection rates.

Monitor the situation by visiting the organizations listed above for more information.

Workplaces can help by having an infection control plan which includes details such as:

- Promoting the use of well-constructed, well-fitting, and properly worn masks (preferably a respirator or medical mask) or personal protective equipment as appropriate and acceptable to your workplace, workers, and customers. Consider any current recommendations from public health or other authorities when determining these measures. Use the best quality and best fitting mask or respirator that is available to you.
- Providing clean hand washing facilities, with soap, water, and disposable towels.
- Offering alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) when regular washing facilities are not available (or to people on the road).
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched or shared surfaces, spaces, and objects, including lunchrooms, washrooms, etc. Clean and disinfect touch points and surfaces such as doorknobs, handles, railings, kettles, etc., more often with household disinfectants or bleach solution (5 millilitres (mL) of (5%) bleach per 250 mL of water). Always pour the bleach into the water, never the other way around. Use a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN). This number means that it has been approved for use in Canada.
- Disinfecting all high-touch electronic devices (keyboards, tablets, smartboards, printers) with alcohol or disinfectant wipes, if the device can withstand liquids (check the owner's manual).
- Making sure that any person required to clean and disinfect has received the appropriate training and uses any required personal protective equipment. The area where the cleaner is used should also be adequately ventilated.
- Providing boxes of tissues and encouraging their use.
- Providing equipment, tools, or communication devices for individual use. If items are shared, they should be cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Reminding workers not to share cups, glasses, dishes, and cutlery. Be sure all items are washed in soap and water after use.

- Making sure ventilation systems are working properly, and are being maintained according to the manufacturer's recommendation. Use filters with the highest minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) rating the system can handle, and have been adjusted to provide the maximum air exchanges per hour.
 - Cleaning a person's workstation or other areas, especially if used by a person suspected or identified to be infected (e.g., use a disinfectant wipe).
 - Offering services that used methods of low contact, such as online ordering, online or phone check-in, delivery, curbside pick up, or by using phone or video instead of meeting in person.
-

How does a coronavirus spread?

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they usually have an animal origin. For example, investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans, and MERS-CoV was transmitted from dromedary camels to humans.

In some cases, the coronavirus can evolve further and spread from person to person. The route of transmission is generally thought to spread from an infected person to others through respiratory particles.

SARS-CoV-2 spreads by:

- respiratory particles generated when an infected person coughs, speaks, sneezes, breathes, sings, or shouts
 - touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands
-

What is meant by “close contact”?

Generally speaking, examples of close contact include:

- Having cared for or lived with a person known to have the virus, including being within 2 metres (6 feet) or within the room or care area of a person with the virus
 - Direct contact with droplets from coughing or sneezing by someone affected by the virus
 - When a person touches a surface contaminated with infection and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes
-

What are the symptoms of infection with COVID-19?

Each coronavirus will vary in the severity of infection it causes. COVID-19 is known to cause a variety of symptoms, with the result being a range including a very mild illness to ones that may be fatal to others. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

COVID-19 presents with fever and symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or difficulty breathing). Common symptoms include:

- sore throat
- runny nose
- sneezing
- new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- temperature equal to or more than 38°C
- feeling feverish
- chills
- fatigue or weakness
- muscle or body aches
- new loss of smell or taste
- headache
- abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting
- feeling very unwell

There is also evidence indicating that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can be transmitted by someone who is infected but not showing symptoms, including people who:

- have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic)
- never develop symptoms (asymptomatic)

Diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection is determined by medical tests as well as the person's exposure history.

Which occupations are at risk?

People caring for individuals with COVID-19 are at the greatest risk for contracting the disease, such as healthcare workers in acute care hospitals, rehabilitation hospitals, mental health hospitals, long-term care facilities, emergency departments, and others who work in close contact with their clients or patients. However, any occupation that has frequent, close, and prolonged interactions between people from different households has an increased risk of transmission.

Persons living with individuals with COVID-19 may also be at risk for contracting the disease. Individuals who are older (over 65) or who have underlying medical conditions or compromised immune systems are at higher risk of developing serious disease outcomes from COVID-19.

What are the recommendations to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus?

Recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to the public to prevent the spread of infection include:

- Keep up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine and any boosters.
- Stay home and away from others (including those you live with) if you feel sick.
- Make sure the indoor space is well-ventilated. Good ventilation exchanges indoor air for outdoor air, helping to reduce the buildup of potentially infectious respiratory particles in the air indoors. Open exterior windows or doors where possible. Refer to [Indoor Ventilation for Respiratory Infectious Diseases \(RIDs\)](#) for more details.
- Avoid poorly ventilated spaces, especially in closed or crowded spaces, or crowded places
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms
- Wear a well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask when:
 - Experiencing symptoms that may be caused by COVID-19 and you need to be around people
 - There is an increase in COVID-19 in the community
 - In settings where the risk of transmission is increased (e.g., settings that are small, crowded, or poorly ventilated)
 - At higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19
- Talk to your employer about working at home if possible.
- Do not neglect your own personal care, take time to exercise, and monitor your mental health. Maintain a strong social support network and seek help when you need it.

- Maximize your physical distance (at least 2 metres) from people you do not live with if recommended by public health authorities.
- Have proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
 - Frequently clean your hands by using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or if soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol)
 - When coughing and sneezing, cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw the tissue away immediately and wash hands
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
 - If your hands are visibly dirty, you should wash them with soap and water instead of using hand sanitizer

Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched by others frequently. Clean surfaces before using disinfectants, and always follow product label directions. If available, choose products that clean and disinfect all at once, such as wipes or commercial disinfectant solutions.

The general guidelines **for public and most workplaces** (non-healthcare) are outlined in the following documents:

- [Hand Washing: Reducing the Risk of Common Infections](#)
- [Good Hygiene Practices - Reducing the Spread of Infections and Viruses](#)

Know the appropriate procedures for general [sanitation and infection control](#) and how to work safely with [hazardous products](#), including [bleach](#).

If using [gloves](#) when cleaning, always wear the appropriate type of glove for the product you are using. The appropriate type of glove material will be listed on that product's safety data sheet (SDS). If this information is missing, contact the supplier or manufacturer of the product. Manufacturers of chemical protective gloves and clothing may also assist their customers in making appropriate choices.

What are measures that can be taken in workplaces that provide health care?

For **healthcare workplaces**, the following precautions should help prevent transmission. In addition, check with organizations such as Health Canada, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO) who will be monitoring any new situation and will include specific infection control guidance for workers at risk as the information becomes available.

There are infection prevention and control measures for various healthcare settings, including acute care, long-term care, home care, and outpatient and ambulatory care.

Measures may include:

- Conducting risk assessments, including a point-of-care assessment
- Following routine practices, including hand hygiene
- Establishing triage and facility access points
- Conducting active screening
- Requiring all workers and visitors to wear a medical mask, as necessary
- Providing information to workers, visitors, and patients
- Providing education and training to all workers
- Establishing procedures for personal protective equipment, including gloves, gowns, masks/respirators, and eye protection as necessary
- Establishing procedures to manage exposures or when signs and symptoms are noted
- Developing procedures to manage wastes, linens, cleaning, and other aspects of the work environment
- Limiting visitors as appropriate
- Monitoring and evaluating procedures and processes for continual improvement or in response to a disease outbreak

Fact sheet last revised: 2024-03-20

Disclaimer

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.