

# The COVID-19 Pandemic

Facts & General Information (March 23, 2020)



**You have been provided this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members as a result of the questions and possible anxiety that has arisen from the recent COVID-19 pandemic.**

## **What is COVID-19?**

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. The virus did not match any other known virus. This raised concern because when a virus is new, we do not know how it affects people. One week later, on 7 January, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new virus. On 11 February 2020, the WHO officially named the disease 'COVID-19'. According to the WHO, a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations.

As of 23 March 2020, 9:00am ET, reports indicate there are now 337,168 confirmed cases with 15,105 fatalities, and 66,907 recoveries.<sup>1</sup>

## **How are COVID-19 infections diagnosed?**

COVID-19 infections are diagnosed by a health care

provider based on symptoms and laboratory tests. In many cases, travel history may be important.

## **How is COVID-19 treated?**

According to Health Canada, currently, there are no specific treatments required for most people with COVID-19 infection, as most people with common coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. Your health care provider may recommend steps you can take to relieve symptoms.

Consult your health care provider as soon as possible if you are concerned about your symptoms or have travelled recently to a region where the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly widespread.

## **How do I reduce the risk of infection?**

To reduce your risk of infection thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based rub; cover

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your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow; avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms; thoroughly cook meat and eggs and have no unprotected contact with live wild animals. The Government of Canada has issued an official global travel advisory, recommending avoidance of all non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice.

### **What is social distancing? How does it help?**

Social distancing measures are a way to minimize COVID-19 transmission in the community. This means minimizing close contact with others during the peak of a pandemic. We should plan for actions we can take if we need to reduce the spread of infection in places where we gather.<sup>2</sup> The virus can easily spread in dense places; in a packed subway car, for example, or at a rally or entertainment event. Social distancing refers to measures that are taken to increase the physical space between people to slow the spread of the virus. Examples include working from home, school closures and the postponement or cancellation of mass gatherings, such as sporting events, conferences and other events. Social distancing helps to slow the transmission of the virus. This in turn lessens the burden on the Canadian healthcare system.

The WHO have posted the following quick tips on how to best protect yourself from risk of infection:<sup>3</sup>

#### **1. Wash your hands frequently**

Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

#### **2. Maintain social distancing**

When someone coughs or sneezes they emit small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you may breathe in the droplets.

#### **3. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.**

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

#### **4. Practice respiratory hygiene.**

Droplets spread the virus. By covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

#### **5. If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early.**

National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

### **How is Canada monitoring the situation?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with international partners, including the World Health Organization, to actively monitor the situation. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer is in close contact with provincial and territorial Chief Medical Officers of Health to ensure that Canada is prepared to rapidly identify and manage COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> As of 20 March 2020, the Government of Canada has taken several measures to control our borders including a ban on foreign nationals from all countries except the United States from entering Canada. This measure does not apply to air crews, travellers arriving in Canada in transit to a third country, Canadian permanent residents, diplomats or immediate family members of Canadian citizens.

The Canadian Government has closed the U.S. and Canadian border to all non-essential travel effective Saturday 21 March 2020.

International flights will be directed to four primary airports, including Calgary, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver international. This measure will not affect domestic flights or flights from the U. S. and sun destinations such as Mexico and the Caribbean.

### **Canada will also implement measures at airports to:**

- increase and strengthen health screening
- increase signage throughout arrival areas to encourage travellers to follow the latest public health guidelines

The Government of Canada has also introduced several economic and financial plans to support those directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For detailed information on Canada's economic recovery plan, please check the following website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

### Fast Facts

- WHO has determined that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).
- As of 23 March 2020 @ 1:45pm ET, there are 1,432 cases in Canada with 20 reported fatalities and eight recoveries.
- Symptoms include: coughing, runny nose, sore throat, fever. Severe cases advance to include difficulty breathing and pneumonia.
- Usually, cases have mild symptoms. 1 in 4 cases has more severe symptoms.

People of all ages can be infected by COVID-19. Still, older individuals and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease appear to be more vulnerable.

### Should I stay home from work?

If you're feeling ill, unwell or concerned, the best thing to do is speak to your manager, HR or occupational health and safety department within your organization. They're there to help.

### Where can I get more information on the novel COVID 19?

Here are some helpful links to gather more information.

#### Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html>

#### World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/>

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

For those persons who may be concerned they may have symptoms of COVID-19, the federal government has created an online self-assessment tool. You will be asked a series of questions and dependent upon the responses and symptoms identified, the tool will provide advice, giving one of the four following actions:

- Visit an emergency room
- Call telehealth
- Self-isolate at home
- Do nothing

The tool can be accessed here:

<https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en>

### I feel very stressed about all of this. Should I still reach out to Homewood Health?

Absolutely. We are here for you 24/7/365 and will help get you the tools, resources and/or support you're looking for.

### What if I was already seeing a counsellor in-person or have an upcoming appointment? How will I know what to do next?

You will be contacted shortly by the person you were seeing, or by Homewood Health, and we'll make the process really clear and simple for you so you understand how you will connect with the counsellor for your session.

### References

1. Channel News Asia. Novel Coronavirus Map (2020)  
Available from: <https://infographics.channelnewsasia.com/covid-19/map.html>
2. Government of Canada. Coronavirus Infection (2020) [cited 2020 Jan 31]. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html>
3. Government of Canada. Coronavirus Infection (2020) [cited 2020 Jan 31]. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html>
4. World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public [cited 2020 Mar 2]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
5. Government of Canada. Coronavirus Infection (2020) [cited 2020 Jan 31]. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

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