

# COVID-19

## Patient education

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### What can cause COVID-19?

The SARS-CoV-2 virus can be spread from person to person through large respiratory droplets and/or smaller droplets called aerosols. These droplets can be transmitted if you:

- Are near an infected person and inhale the droplets/aerosols released from the infected person when they breathe, talk, cough, sneeze, or shout.
- Touch something that has the virus on it and then touch your mouth, eyes, or nose with unwashed hands.

### What increases the risks?

Those at a higher risk of developing severe outcomes from a COVID-19 infection include:

- Older adults
- Pregnant women
- People that have not received all the recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses
- People who have a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease, lung disease, etc.
- People who are immunocompromised (weakened immune system)
- People living with obesity

### How can I avoid getting and spreading COVID-19?

- Wear a well-fitted mask
- Maintain physical distancing
- Wash your hands and/or use alcohol-based hand rub frequently
- Be outdoors or in a well-ventilated indoor space
- Do not visit other people when feeling unwell

Getting vaccinated and staying up to date with booster doses is the best way to protect yourself against severe outcomes of COVID-19, including hospitalization and death. Vaccines are available to everyone six months and older in Ontario.

## How do I know that I have COVID-19?

Some people with COVID-19 may be asymptomatic (do not develop any symptoms) but can still spread the virus to others. For people that develop symptoms, symptoms may appear within seven days after exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. COVID-19 symptoms vary from person to person (depending on age and the COVID-19 variant) and can range from mild, like those of the flu, to severe.

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- New or worsening cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever (temperature equal to or greater than 38°C)
- Chills
- Fatigue or weakness
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- New loss of smell or taste
- Headache
- Abdominal pain
- Gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, particularly in children less than 18 years old

Complications of COVID-19 include pneumonia or death.

If you are experiencing mild or severe symptoms of COVID-19, or believe that you have been exposed to a person with COVID-19, talk to your health care provider. Health care providers can determine if you have COVID-19 by assessing your symptoms and ordering a PCR test or a rapid antigen test.

## How is this treated?

Most people with COVID-19 experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover at home without needing any special treatment. Your health care provider may recommend over-the-counter medications to reduce and/or relieve certain symptoms, like fever and cough.

Health care providers may prescribe COVID-19 antiviral medications to treat eligible adults that are at a higher risk of progressing to severe disease, including older adults, people with chronic medical conditions, or people that haven't been vaccinated.

**If you are experiencing any of the following, please contact your doctor or health care provider immediately, or call 911 if this is a medical emergency:**

- Difficulty breathing or severe shortness of breath
- Persistent pressure or pain in chest
- Difficulty waking up or staying awake
- New onset of confusion
- Pale, gray, or blue-coloured lips, skin, or nail beds

**Where can I get more information?**

About COVID-19: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

About the COVID-19 vaccine: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/vaccines.html>

**References:**

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World Health Organization: WHO. (2020). *Coronavirus*. *www.who.int*. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1)