

Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health

COVID-19 information for patients with chronic health conditions

Q 1. Who is at higher risk for COVID-19 complications?

We are still learning about COVID-19. For people infected with COVID-19, there is a wide range in infection severity from no symptoms to severe pneumonia and risk of death. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there are people who are at a higher risk of developing more severe illness or complications from COVID-19.

Although most people with COVID-19 recover, people with chronic diseases are also at higher risk of death if they become ill. This includes:

- People with medical conditions such as Heart disease; Hypertension (high blood pressure); Lung disease; Diabetes; and Cancer.
- People with weakened immune systems from a medical condition or treatment, such as chemotherapy
- Older adults

Q 2. How can I avoid getting sick with COVID-19?

The best way to currently protect yourself from COVID-19 is protective self-isolation and maintaining physical distance. Stay away from other people who are ill. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others. Avoid contact with others if they have travelled or are a contact of a COVID-19 case.

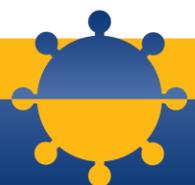
Physical Distancing



- When outside of your home, practicing physical distancing by keeping two meters (six feet) away from others.
- Give a friendly wave instead of a handshake, kiss or hug if you see someone you know
- Keep any interactions as brief as possible
- Wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face.
- If you have to cough or sneeze, try to do it into your elbow or a tissue, and then wash your hands afterwards.
- Washing your hands properly means using soap and water and washing for at least 20 seconds. Handwashing is preferred over alcohol based hand sanitizer. If your hands have dirt or food or anything else on them, you should use soap and water because hand sanitizer may not work.

Q 3. Will wearing a mask protect me from being infected?

- Wearing a medical face mask (surgical or procedural) does not protect against COVID-19 infection.
- Our advice for patients with chronic health conditions is the same as for others. In general face masks should be used by sick people to prevent the spread of germs to others, health care workers, or those caring for a person with COVID-19 symptoms.



- Learn more about medical and non-medical (home made) masks or wearing a mask when you are healthy on our [website](#).

Q 4. Should I still go to my medical appointments?

If possible, only leave your home for medically necessary appointments. It's important to ensure you continue to receive medical care for your chronic conditions.

If you have to leave your home:

- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes and/or food with your hands.
- Avoid touching high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails and elevator buttons in public places.
- If you need to touch surfaces in public places, use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand.
- Wash your hands frequently. Carry alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you have it to clean your hands when you don't have access to a sink.

Q 5. What if I get sick? Do I need a test?

Pay attention to your health and monitor yourself for the [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Download the [COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool](#) on your mobile device or go to [BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#). The self assessment tool will help to determine what you should do next. You can also call 8-1-1 any time.

When to seek Medical Care

Mild Symptoms

- If your symptoms are mild and can be managed at home (e.g., fever, cough, sneezing, or sore throat) continue to self-isolate at home.

Worsening Symptoms

- If your symptoms worsen or you are concerned, complete the [BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#) or call 8-1-1 any time.
- Examples include mild to moderate shortness of breath, inability to lie down because of difficulty breathing, any new chest pain and chronic health conditions that you are having difficulty managing because of difficulty breathing.
- **If your symptoms worsen, it is important to seek medical help early.** Please consult your family doctor or nurse practitioner. If you are unable to reach your regular care provider, seek care in a COVID-19 Assessment and Treatment Centre, [Urgent & Primary Care Centre](#) or Emergency Department. When going in person please call ahead and tell them your symptoms, and that you have a chronic health condition.

Severe Symptoms require immediate medical attention.

- Examples include severe difficulty breathing (e.g. struggling to breathe or speaking in single words), severe chest pain, having a very hard time waking up, or feeling confused or losing consciousness.
- Call 9-1-1 immediately, or go directly to your nearest emergency department. If possible, you or someone caring for you should call ahead and tell them your symptoms and that you have a chronic health condition.

When seeking medical care

- **Wear a medical face mask** (surgical or procedural). If a medical mask is not available, use a non-medical mask or facial covering, e.g. homemade cloth mask, dust mask, bandana or if that is not readily available, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.



- **Do not use public transportation.** This includes buses, taxis or ride-sharing where you would be in contact with others.

Q 6. Should I have medication and other supplies on hand in case I can't go out?

- The Public Health Agency of Canada has issued guidance for all [Canadians on preparedness and COVID-19](#).
- Stock up on the supplies you would need if you were to have to stay home for a few weeks, such as groceries, pet food and cleaning products.
 - Prepare to stay connected with others by phone or email.
 - Ask family, a neighbor or friend to help with essential errands (e.g., picking up prescriptions, buying groceries).
 - Identify which services are available to deliver food or medications to your home.
- Talk with your health care provider about how to protect yourself and ensure you have enough of your prescribed medications and medical supplies. If possible, have at least a two-week supply of your medications on hand.

Q 7. Should I stay at home?

- Yes, as much as possible. People with certain chronic conditions should practice **protective self-isolation**. Protective self-isolation means staying at home and being separate from other people as much as possible.
- For many people, staying at home for long periods will not be an option. As you have a chronic condition, plan for how you can avoid close contact with others outside your home.
- At this time, everyone in BC, not just those with chronic conditions are asked to stay at home and avoid contact with others to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.
- All in-person gatherings of any size are strongly discouraged and it is important for everyone to avoid crowds and large gatherings.

Q 8. Should I change my travel plans?

- The Public Health Agency of Canada is advising travellers to avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada and avoid cruises.
- [Health Canada travel advisories](#) should be consulted before any travel for people with chronic conditions.
- As of March 25, 2020, all persons arriving in Canada must self-isolate (quarantine) and monitor for symptoms for 14 days under the [Quarantine Act](#). Unless you are exempt, all international travellers returning to B.C. are required by law to self-isolate for 14 days and complete a self-isolation plan. Travellers must submit a self-isolation plan for approval prior to their return to B.C., or upon arrival.

Q 9. Where can I get more health information?

- Visit our [BCCDC COVID-19 website](#)
- Call 8-1-1. At [HealthLinkBC](#) nurses are available 24 hours a day/7 days a week with translation services.

Non-medical information

- For the most up to date non-medical information you can visit the [BC Government's COVID-19 Provincial Support](#)
- The province has created a phone service to provide **non-medical** information about COVID-19. You can call 7 days a week with translation services from 7:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. Call **1-888-COVID19** (1-888-268-4319) or via text message at **604-630-0300**.

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