

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that originate in animals but are known to cause respiratory infections in humans. Novel coronaviruses include Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, China in late 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 spreads through direct contact with respiratory droplets or someone who is affected with the virus (e.g., when they cough or sneeze). These droplets can spread up to 2 metres or 6 feet. A person could also get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

What are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19?

In general, human coronaviruses commonly cause mild, but occasionally more severe respiratory infections. It is estimated that they cause about 15% of common colds. Older patients and those with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Some of the symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever
- New onset of cough or worsening chronic cough
- Muscle aches and tiredness
- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- Runny nose, nasal congestion (without other known cause)
- Sore throat
- Decrease or loss of sense of taste or smell
- Chills, headaches
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- For those over 70 years of age, they may experience symptoms of delirium, unexplained falls, acute functional decline or worsening of chronic conditions.

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus.

How do you prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Everyone has a role to play in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Protect yourself and others by following [prevention and management measures](#):

- Follow guidance from your [local public health authority](#)
- Clean your hands often
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth
- Cover your cough
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Wear a mask or face covering that completely covers the nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact with someone who is sick
- Practice physical distancing:

- limit activities outside of the home
- When outside of the home, stay at least 2 meters (6 feet) away from other people whenever possible

Should I get tested for COVID-19?

Take the Government of Ontario's self-assessment for guidance on whether you should get tested: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>. For specific medical advice about your individual health, please contact: your health care provider (e.g., family doctor, nurse practitioner) or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000. **Please do not** call 911 if it is not an emergency.

Where do I get a PCR test and how much does it cost?

Visit the Government of Ontario's COVID-19 website for information about COVID-19 testing locations (e.g., assessment centres and pharmacies): <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-test-and-testing-location-information>. Testing is a free service, except for travel purposes. Call your [local public health unit](#) if you have questions, cannot find a centre near you or if you are waiting for results and have questions about whether you can return to work or school.

What should I do if I have been exposed to a COVID-19 case?

Public health officials working in government are contacting individuals to notify them if they have been identified as a contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19. If you received a call or text from public health and it's confirmed you have been exposed to a COVID-19 case, you need to immediately self-isolate (quarantine) from other people for 14 days. This means you cannot leave your home for any reason, unless you are going to get tested for COVID-19 or have an emergency. For more information, see our [How to Self Isolate Fact Sheet](#). If you start to experience any [COVID-19 symptoms](#), you should get tested for COVID-19, even if you were previously tested and were negative.

If you are aware you have come in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 prior to being contacted by public health, contact your [local public health unit](#) for advice and to discuss any questions you may have.

Is there a COVID-19 vaccine?

Safe and reliable vaccines are effective for reducing the impact of infectious disease. Visit the [Government of Ontario's website](#) for COVID-19 vaccine eligibility requirements and vaccine booking information. If you have additional questions, please contact [your local public health unit](#). In Ontario, public health units are coordinating the roll-out of Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine program in local communities based on guidance from the Ontario Ministry of Health.

Can the same person get COVID-19 more than once?

To date, there is no well-documented evidence of people becoming infected more than once. Most people who have been infected with COVID-19 develop antibodies (substances the body makes to protect against future infection as a result of past infection or vaccination). However, it is still uncertain if these antibodies will protect a person from future infections. More research is needed to help answer these questions.

How long is someone with COVID-19 infectious for?

The length of time someone is infectious with COVID-19 is not known for certain. Some studies suggest that people are no longer infectious after 7 or 8 days from the start of their symptoms. However, after that time it is still possible to find parts of the virus in the nose and throat of some

people. [Ontario guidelines](#) indicate that infected people with symptoms should generally remain separate from others (isolated) for 14 days after they first developed symptoms. After that they are considered no longer infectious, as long as they have no fever and their symptoms have been improving for at least 72 hours.

How long can COVID-19 survive on different surfaces?

There is very little information about how long COVID-19 can survive on and spreads from surfaces at this time. One [study](#) found that the virus can live for up to 72 hours, depending on the type of surface it was on. A person may be exposed to COVID-19 if they touch a surface that the virus has landed on that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes without cleaning their hands.

How is COVID-19 detected?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is detected through a lab test known as a PCR test (polymerase chain reaction testing)

The test requires a sample from a person, which is collected by a health care provider. The gold standard for sample collection method is the nasopharyngeal swab, a swab inserted deep into a person's nose. However, other sample types exist including combinations of a nose and throat swab and also saliva samples.

PCR tests are designed to look for the virus' genetic material (i.e. RNA).

For more information about COVID-19 PCR testing, read our blog post [Explained: COVID-19 PCR Testing and Cycle Thresholds](#).

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

There is no specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19. People ill with COVID-19 should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms. People with more severe illness may require hospitalization.