



Coronaviruses and COVID-19

The term coronavirus does not refer to a specific virus. Coronaviruses are in fact a large family of viruses. COVID-19 is the name of disease caused by the virus first identified in Wuhan (China) in 2019. The official name of the virus is SARS-CoV-2.

Symptoms

The 3 most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing

COVID-19 may sometimes be associated with other symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Muscle ache
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea)
- Sudden loss of smell and taste

Symptom severity varies greatly from one individual to another. Most people have mild to moderate symptoms that resemble a cold, while others will have more severe symptoms that resemble pneumonia.

Individuals with greater risk of complications and death from COVID-19 are:

- People with a weakened immune systems
- People with chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, heart, lung or kidney disease)
- People 70 years of age or greater

Transmission

Most coronaviruses infect the respiratory tract, which includes the nose, throat and lungs. The infection can be spread:

- Through the air (e.g., when an infected person coughs or sneezes)
- By direct contact (e.g., kissing or other forms of physical contact)
- By indirect contact (e.g., touching contaminated objects)

Transmission of coronaviruses is usually similar to other respiratory viruses such as influenza (flu). People are thought to be most contagious when they are very symptomatic. Individuals may be contagious 48 hours before the onset of symptoms. It is therefore possible that the virus will be transmitted in the absence of symptoms.

Prevention

The following hygiene measures are recommended for all:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow to avoid spreading germs.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces.

Other measures that can also help prevent the spreading the virus:

- Avoid physical contact with people who are infected.

- Avoid contact with individuals at greater risk of complications from COVID-19.
- Respect social distancing
 - Stay home if possible.
 - Avoid all nonessential trips.
 - Do not gather in groups.
 - Maintain a distance of at least 2 meters from other people. Household contacts do not need to distance from each other.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face covering when social distancing is not possible (e.g., public transportation)
 - Wearing a face mask does not replace other measures of prevention such as social distancing or handwashing.
 - Don't place a mask on a child under the age of 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or on anyone incapable of removing it without help.
- Isolate yourself at home for 14 days if you are showing symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Stay in a separate room if you live with others, if possible.

Treatment

People with severe symptoms or who are at high risk of complications are treated in the hospital and receive appropriate support that varies based on their symptoms.

There is a vaccine to protect against COVID-19. Speak to your health care provider for more information on the COVID-19 vaccine.

When should I see a medical professional?

If you are only showing mild symptoms (e.g., mild cough or fever), a medical consultation is usually not necessary. Isolate yourself and monitor your symptoms. If you are showing more severe symptoms (e.g., fever, shortness of breath, cough), call your healthcare provider and follow their instructions.

Seek immediate medical attention or call 911 if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Confusion
- Bluish lips or face

For more information:
www.canada.ca/en/public-health