

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **Q1. What is a coronavirus? What is COVID-19?**

A1. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that circulate both in humans and animals. Human coronaviruses are common and are typically associated with mild illness, similar to the common cold and spread easily between people. There are however, strains of coronaviruses that have spread from animals to humans which have caused more severe illness in humans in the past, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). These tend to have more difficulty spreading from person to person.

Your risk of severe disease may be higher if you have a weakened immune system. This may be the case for:

- older people
- people with chronic disease such as diabetes, cancer, heart, renal or chronic lung disease

On December 31, 2019, Chinese health authorities identified a new (or novel) coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19) through a series of reported cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China.

It is thought that this new coronavirus originated in animals.

### **Q2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

A2. COVID-19 symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Muscle aches and tiredness
- Difficulty breathing

Less commonly: sore throat, headache and diarrhea have been reported.

Older patients and those with chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness.

If you have travelled from Hubei Province, China, or Iran within the last 14 days or have had close contact with a person ill with COVID-19, please self-isolate and contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 within 24 hours of arriving in Toronto. Information about self-isolation is available in the Other Resources section below.

If you have travelled to an area under a [travel health advisory](#) for COVID-19, and develop symptoms of COVID-19 infection, avoid contact with others and call your health care professional prior to visiting.

### **Q3. Can COVID-19 be spread from person-to-person?**

A3. Coronaviruses can spread through droplets when a person who has the virus coughs or sneezes, similar to how the flu and other respiratory illnesses are spread.

Some viruses are highly contagious, while other viruses are less so. It's not clear yet how easily COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person.

**Q4. How soon after being exposed to COVID-19 would symptoms occur?**

A4. The World Health Organization advises that symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 10 to 14 days after contracting COVID-19. This time period may also be refined as new information comes out.

**Q5. How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

A5. It is diagnosed by a healthcare provider based on symptoms and laboratory tests. Travel history is also important.

**Q6. What can members of the public do to protect themselves?**

A6. In general, everyday preventive actions can help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early and share your recent travel history with your health care provider

In addition, workplaces should follow any routine infection prevention and control policies and procedures set out by their company or organization

### **Q7. Is there treatment for COVID-19?**

A7. Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19. However, many of the symptoms can be treated and therefore treatment is based on the patient's clinical condition.

### **Q8. Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?**

A8. There are no specific treatments for coronaviruses, and there is no vaccine that protects against coronaviruses. Most people with common human coronavirus illness will recover on their own.

If symptoms feel worse than a standard cold, see your health care practitioner. They can relieve symptoms by prescribing a pain or fever medication.

You should also:

- drink plenty of fluids
- get rest and sleep as much as possible
- try a humidifier or a hot shower to help with a sore throat or cough

**Q9. Are there any confirmed cases in Toronto?**

A9. As of March 12, 2020, Toronto Public Health is monitoring 29 positive cases of COVID-19 in Toronto. To date, there have been four other confirmed cases reported in Toronto. All four of these people have since recovered from their illness. TPH continues to work with our provincial and federal health colleagues along with airports in response to this situation. At this time the virus is not circulating locally, however given the global circumstances, TPH is actively working with City and health partners to plan for the potential of local spread.

**Q10. What is Toronto Public Health doing in response to this situation?**

A10. Toronto Public Health continues to actively monitor this situation in collaboration with our provincial and national health colleagues, and stakeholders, including local hospitals, airports and community agencies.

Cases and suspected cases of COVID-19 are now reportable to local health authorities under the provincial *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. As we are notified of potential cases, we are immediately following up directly with these individuals to let them know.

We are informing these people of the potential health risk, and providing education and instruction on when and how to seek medical care, if that becomes necessary. This work is part of routine public health follow-up of a case of an infectious disease.

**Q11. What are Canadian public health officials doing in response to this situation?**

A11. The Public Health Agency of Canada is actively monitoring the COVID-19 situation. They are in close contact with the World Health Organization to assess any potential risk to Canadians.

In addition to Canada's standard measures to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases in Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada are implementing additional measures. These include messaging on arrival screens at the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver international airports, reminding travelers to inform a Border Services Officer if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms, and an additional health screening question was added to electronic kiosks.

Canada has no direct flights from Wuhan, and the volume of travelers arriving indirectly from Wuhan is low. The Government of Canada, as well as provinces and territories have multiple systems in place to identify, prevent and control the spread of serious infectious diseases into and within Canada.

**Q12. What measures are being taken at the Canadian border?**

A12. Canada has a number of standard border measures in place to prevent communicable diseases from being introduced to or spreading in Canada.

Measures have been implemented including messaging on arrivals screens at the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver international airports reminding travellers to inform a Border Services Officer if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms. In addition, a health screening question has been added to electronic kiosks.

**Q13. What is the overall risk for getting COVID-19 while in Canada?**

A13. At this time the virus is not circulating locally, however given the global circumstances, TPH is actively working with City and health partners to plan for the potential of local spread. The Public Health Agency of Canada is continuing to collaborate with partners internationally as well as to share information and work with federal, provincial and territorial partners and public health authorities and to maintain Canada's preparedness to rapidly identify, treat and prevent the spread of this emerging disease.

**Q14. What is the risk to Canadians travelling internationally? Is there any advice for travellers related to the COVID-19 outbreak?**

A14. No matter where Canadians plan to travel, the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that they consult [travel.gc.ca](https://travel.gc.ca), which is the Government of Canada's official source of destination-specific travel information. It provides important advice to help travelers make informed decisions and travel safely while abroad. As this is a rapidly evolving

situation, travelers should check the website and consult with their health care provider prior to travelling.

**Q15. What should I do if I travelled internationally and develop symptoms of COVID-19 infection?**

A15. Travellers who have returned from Hubei province, including Wuhan City, or Iran should:

- Contact their [local public health unit](#) within 24 hours of arriving in Canada
- Stay at home and avoid close contact with others, including those in their home, for a total of 14 days from the date they left Hubei province or Iran
- Contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or their [local public health unit](#) or call their primary care provider's office if they experience symptoms of COVID-19
- Call ahead prior to visiting any health care provider and let them know about travel history and symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) so that they can make special arrangements to see you quickly, provide testing, and ensure that they use proper infection control measures

Travellers who have returned from areas under a [travel health advisory](#) for COVID-19 (other than Hubei Province or Iran) should:



- Monitor themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days after leaving the affected area
- Contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or their [local public health unit](#) or call their primary care provider's office if they experience symptoms of COVID-19
- Call ahead prior to visiting any healthcare provider and let them know about travel history and symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) so that they can make special arrangements to see you quickly, provide testing, and ensure that they use proper infection control measures

### **Q16. When will I need to self-isolate/stay at home?**

A16. You will need to stay home and self-isolate if:

- You have a lab-confirmed COVID-19 infection, do not require hospitalization, and a medical practitioner has indicated that you can recover at home.
- You are being assessed for COVID-19 infection by a healthcare provider.
- You have traveled from Hubei Province, China, or Iran within the past 14 days
- You are a returning traveler from an area under a [travel health advisory](#) for COVID-19 (other than Hubei Province or Iran) and develop respiratory symptoms within 14 days of travel. Please promptly self-isolate and contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-

0000, your [local public health unit](#) or call your primary care provider's office

- Call ahead prior to visiting any healthcare provider and let them know about travel history and symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) so that they can make special arrangements to see you quickly, provide testing, and ensure that they use proper infection control measures

Information on how to self monitor, how to self-isolate, and caring for someone who is self-isolating is available on Public Health

Ontario's [COVID-19 Public Resources](#) page.

### **Q17. Should I wear a mask to protect myself against COVID-19?**

A17. For general, day-to-day activities, there is no need to wear a surgical or N95 mask.

Toronto Public Health advises residents to take the usual measures to reduce the risk of influenza and other respiratory infections:

- Get a yearly flu vaccination, available from clinics and pharmacies as this is the best way to prevent influenza infection
- Clean your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm
- Stay at home if you are sick.

Toronto Public Health does not recommend that individuals incur out of pocket expenses for items that are not recommended according to health evidence.

**Q18. Are there any neighbourhoods or communities in Toronto that should be avoided due to COVID-19?**

A18. There are no Toronto neighbourhoods or communities that pose a risk for contracting COVID-19. Some residents may believe that they should avoid certain neighbourhoods, restaurants, markets and other businesses in Toronto because of travel advisories for certain countries. Scientific evidence does not support the need for this type of avoidance. Fearing specific neighbourhoods and communities in our city contributes to stigma and discrimination which is hurtful and unhelpful. The best way to protect yourself is through the general prevention strategies listed in A6.

**Q19. What should employers do if an employee is returning to work after travelling internationally?**

A19. Employees who have been in Hubei Province, China, or Iran within 14 days will be advised by Toronto Public Health to not attend work and to self-isolate during this 14 day period. They are also asked to contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 within 24 hours of arriving in Toronto. Those who have recently travelled to other areas under a travel health advisory and develop symptoms of COVID-19 are asked to avoid contact with others and contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their local public health unit or their primary care provider's office.

Employers in Ontario are legally required to observe and uphold the Ontario Human Rights Code. On January 28, 2020, the Ontario Human Rights Commission [released a statement](#) indicating that:

“discriminatory action against any persons or communities because of an association with COVID-19, perceived or otherwise, is prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code.”

Employees returning from an affected area should not be subject to any exclusion or other adverse treatment as this may constitute discrimination under the Code. Workers who believe that they are being discriminated against can contact their union, human resources department and/or the [Ontario Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#) at 1-866-625-5179.

There are no additional precautions employers need to take if an employee is returning from international travel. In general, the everyday preventive actions listed in A6 can help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses.

**Q20. To protect the school population from COVID-19, should students who recently returned from international travel be asked to stay home from school?**

A20. There is no requirement to restrict school attendance for students who recently returned from international travel other than recent return from Hubei Province, China, or Iran. Students who have recently returned from Hubei Province, China, or Iran will be asked by Toronto Public Health to stay home and self-isolate as a precaution for 14 days from the time

they were in Hubei Province, China, or Iran. Students who have recently travelled to an affected area and develop symptoms of COVID-19 are asked to avoid contact with others and contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their local public health unit or their primary care provider's office.

On January 28, 2020, the Ontario Human Rights Commission [released a statement](#) on asking all students who have returned from China to stay home from school. According to the Commission, "discriminatory action against any persons or communities because of an association with COVID-19, perceived or otherwise, is prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code."

There are no additional precautions schools need to take if a student is returning from international travel. In general, the everyday preventive actions listed in A6 can help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses.

**Q21. Does someone who has come into contact with a contact of a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 need to self isolate?**

A21. Contacts of contacts do not need to self-isolate and do not need to take any additional precautions. Self-isolation is a precautionary measure only recommended for people who are in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 (e.g. a household member), or for people returning from certain areas under a [travel health advisory](#) for COVID-19.



**Q22. Will Toronto Public Health provide letters for individuals who have notified their school or workplace that they are required to self-isolate?**

A20. TPH will provide letters for people who we are monitoring in self-isolation.

Source: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/diseases-medications-vaccines/coronavirus/>