Coronavirus (COVID-19)

A Northern Health guide for your community

These are uncertain times and many Northerners are feeling anxious or worried. As your health authority, we wanted to let you know what we’re doing to prepare for the COVID-19 outbreak.

We also want to talk about the vital role that we all have in preventing infection and slowing the spread, so we can all stay as safe as possible.

This document will be updated as new information becomes available.

NH Communications - April 2, 2020
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What is coronavirus/COVID-19?
A new coronavirus has caused an outbreak of respiratory illness known as COVID-19. Many of the characteristics of COVID-19 are still unknown, but mild to severe illness has been reported for confirmed cases.

What are the symptoms?
The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to those of other respiratory infections, including the flu. COVID-19 symptoms can include some or all of the following:

- Cough
- Fever
- Breathing difficulties
- Headache
- Generalized muscle pain
- Sore throat

Some people with the infection will have mild symptoms, or none at all, but they can still spread the virus to others – who might develop more severe symptoms.

Who is most at risk of severe illness?
People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus. People over 70, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease) are more likely to be severely ill.

What is the risk in pregnancy?
Based on the evidence we have so far, pregnant women are no more likely to get COVID-19 than the general population.

In some women, pregnancy changes how your body responds to severe viral infections. This is something midwives and obstetricians have known for many years and are used to dealing with.

Currently, there is no evidence that pregnant women who get this infection are more at risk of serious complications than any other healthy individuals, but the amount of evidence available is quite limited, so if you’re pregnant, please take extra care.

For more information, check [www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/clinical-care/pregnancy](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/clinical-care/pregnancy)
How is COVID-19 spread?
COVID-19 spreads mainly through tiny drops of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

This means it’s very important to cough or sneeze into your elbow, or into a tissue.

How can I avoid getting and spreading the virus?

1. Practice physical distancing

Practice physical distancing. Physical distancing saves lives by reducing the chance you will become infected. It also slows the spread of infection over a longer period of time, so Northern Health has a better chance of keeping up. It’s everyone’s responsibility to practice social distancing, whether you have symptoms or not.

   a. Avoid close contact with other people. Keep at least 2 meters (6 feet) away from them.

   b. Avoid public transport – buses, taxis, ride-sharing.

   c. Work from home – speak to your employer about this.

   d. Avoid social activities such as going to cafes, pubs, restaurants, or movie theaters.

   e. Avoid events with groups of more than 50 people.

   f. Avoid going on children’s playdates, such as going to a playground or park.

   g. Don’t have visitors to your home. This includes friends and family (other than the family members you live with).

2. Wash your hands often

   a. Wash your hands often with soap and water– for at least 20 seconds.

   b. Always wash your hands when you get home or arrive at work.

3. Use hand sanitizer

   If soap and water are unavailable, use hand sanitizer.

4. Use coughing etiquette

   a. Cough or sneeze into your elbow, or into a tissue.

   b. Put used tissues in the garbage immediately, and then wash your hands.

5. Avoid touching your face

Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth.

h. Don’t go to your doctor’s office without phoning ahead.

i. If you have questions, call your family doctor or nurse practitioner. You can also call the NH COVID-19 Online Clinic at 1-844-645-7811.
How can I avoid getting and spreading COVID-19?

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and hot water, or use hand sanitizer.
- Use a tissue for coughs and sneezes.
- If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- Even if you have no symptoms, work at home if possible and avoid social venues.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19? What should I do if I feel sick?

- Fever and tiredness
- Breathing difficulties
- Cough

If you have a new continuous cough or high temperature you should stay at home for 10 days.

Practice physical distancing (stay 2 meters away from other people) and stay home if possible.

Call the Northern Health COVID-19 online clinic at 1-844-645-7811. Don’t go to your doctor or health care facility.

If your symptoms get worse, seek medical advice.
Tips for physical distancing
We’re asking you to avoid physical contact with people outside your home, including those you love and enjoy spending time with.

- Use technology to connect remotely.
- Setting elderly family members up with technology to allow for video calls can be a big help.
- Ask your elderly or vulnerable family members, neighbours, and friends if you can drop groceries off (on their front porch) for them.
- Neighbourhood Facebook or WhatsApp groups can help people connect and look after each other.
- Check out the cards at the end of this booklet. If you like, leave some on the front steps of houses along your street to offer help to those who are staying at home.

How long will we need to be physically distant?
We all need to follow the recommendations of our public health officer, health authorities, and government. Right now, it’s everyone’s responsibility to slow the spread.

We don’t know the timeline yet, but you can count on Northern Health to keep you informed.

What should I do if I develop symptoms of COVID-19?

1. Self-isolate. This means you need to stay at home if you have any of the following:

   a. A fever. If you don’t have a thermometer, you might feel hot to touch on your chest or back.

   b. A new, continuous, dry cough. This means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).

   c. Difficulty breathing

   d. A sore throat

2. People who live with you also need to self-isolate (see guidelines in the section on the next page called “How long should I self-isolate for?”).

3. Call the Northern Health COVID-19 online clinic and information line at 1-844-645-7811. It’s run by nurses, doctors, and nurse practitioners – they will help you decide if you need to be tested.

4. Don’t go to see your family doctor or nurse practitioner, pharmacist, or emergency department. Instead of going in person, call your family doctor or nurse practitioner.
How long should I self-isolate for?

1. **If you have symptoms of COVID-19,** you need to stay home for **10 days.**

2. **If you’re returning from travel,** you need to self-isolate for **14 days** (even if you don’t have symptoms).

3. **If you live with someone** who has symptoms, you need to stay home for **10 days** from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms.

   a. **If you also develop symptoms,** you need to stay home for **10 days** from the day your symptoms began.

4. After 10 days, if your temperature is normal and you feel better, you can return to your routine activities. You might still have a dry cough, but that’s OK. Your cough might last for a few weeks, but if you just have a cough (and no other symptoms), it’s OK to stop self-isolating after 10 days.

If you have symptoms and you live with someone who is 70 or older, has a long-term health condition, is pregnant, or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else for them to stay for 10 days.

If you have to stay home together, try to keep away from each other as much as possible.

**Treatment for COVID-19**

There is currently no treatment for COVID-19. Antibiotics don’t work against viruses, only against bacteria.

- COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so taking antibiotics won’t stop you from getting it.
- As well, taking antibiotics won’t help you get better if you have COVID-19.
- However, if you’re hospitalized for COVID-19, you might be given antibiotics because bacterial co-infection is possible.

If you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19, you need to stay home (along with all other members of your household) for 10 days after your symptoms begin.

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**What’s the difference between self-isolation and physical distancing?**

**Self-isolation:** avoiding situations where you could infect other people. People at high-risk of having been exposed to the illness are asked to self-isolate.

**Physical distancing** is a way that we can slow the spread of COVID-19 by limiting close contact with others. Even though we’re not sick, we should still keep about two meters (six feet), or the length of a queen-sized bed, from one another when we can, when outside our homes.
**Physical Distancing NOW**

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**Symptom-free doesn’t mean infection-free**
Stay Healthy!

Help stop the spread of germs. Protect yourself and others.

Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure to dry your hands.

Avoid touching your face. Viruses can live on your hands for up to 5 minutes and on hard surfaces for up 2 days.

Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Remember to wash and dry your hands after coughing or sneezing.

If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible, then wash your hands.

Northern Health COVID-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: 1-844-645-7811
BC Govt. COVID-19 Helpline: 1-888-COVID19 or 1-888-268-4319
**MENTAL Wellness**

- Take breaks from social media
- Help others if you can
- Ensure you are getting regular and good quality nutrition, sleep, and exercise
- Connect with friends & family in a way that keeps you and others safe: like phone and video calls

**Mental health resources:**
We know that this is an uncertain time and can trigger significant stress. The following resources can provide tips for managing COVID-19 stress, anxiety, and depression.

**Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety, & Depression**  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/managing-covid-stress](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/managing-covid-stress)

**COVID-19 and Anxiety**  
[www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/covid-19-and-anxiety](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/covid-19-and-anxiety)

**If you need help:**

**Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre**  
Provides confidential, non-judgmental, free emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including thoughts of suicide.

Call 604-872-3311 (Greater Vancouver)  
Toll-free 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)  
[www.crisiscentre.bc.ca](http://www.crisiscentre.bc.ca)

**The KUU-US Crisis Response Service**  
Provides 24/7 culturally-aware crisis support to Indigenous Peoples in B.C.

Call 1-800-588-8717  
[www.kuu-uscrisisline.ca](http://www.kuu-uscrisisline.ca)
The Province of BC has put in place a multi-level response structure, headed by the Premier and Health Minister. Below this are committees and coordination centres focused on providing information and coordinating the response for Public Health and health system operations, planning, logistics and finance.

1. **Cabinet Sub-Committee**
   Chaired by Premier John Horgan and Minister of Health Adrian Dix.

2. **Deputy Minister Committee**
   Chaired by the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Deputy Minister, Emergency Management BC.

3. **Communication and Information Centre**
   To serve the general public.

4. **Health Emergency Coordination Centre (HECC)**
   Incident Commander for the Ministry of Health coordination centre is Peter Pokorny, Associate Deputy Minister. The HECC includes the following streams of work:
   - Public Health Operations
   - Planning
   - Logistics
   - Finance
   - Health System Operations (includes a Health Authority Chief Operating Officers group)
All NH sites are involved in the ongoing planning and preparation for COVID-19. NH has an emergency operations centre (EOC) in place to oversee the response to COVID-19. It includes the following 11 task groups:

1. **Phase Scenario and Response**
   - Ensuring provincial guidelines, policy and procedures for screening, testing, contact tracing, and isolation are understood, communicated, and followed, as they evolve, working with industry work camps to ensure prevention and management of COVID-19 is understood.

2. **Acute Management & Ambulatory Care**
   - Inventories of capacity, equipment, reducing non-urgent procedures, and services to increase capacity.

3. **Long-Term Care Response & Capacity**
   - Capacity inventories, and protecting residents with visitor access restrictions, and screening.

4. **Population and Public Health**
   - Reviewing essential service plans and staff deployment plans; ensuring staff have clear PPE use information, and access to psychological health and safety resources.
Task groups continued

6 Logistics and Supply
Tracking and managing supply use; strategies for mitigating supply shortages.

7 Communications
Working with Ministry of Health to develop and share clear and frequently-updated information to NH clinicians, front-line health care workers and staff, stakeholders and communities.

8 Business Continuity
Ensuring critical business areas such as staffing, payroll and information systems are not interrupted.

9 Emergency Departments & Patient Transfer
Ensuring EDs are prepared and patient transfer protocols are clear; scenario-based exercises.

10 Primary and Community Care / Urgent & Primary Care Centres
Establishing virtual options for screening, assessment and referral for testing.

11 Infection Prevention & Control & Environmental Cleaning
In NH facilities.
The Province of BC has a 4-phased outbreak response. Here’s how Northern Health has implemented it so far:

**Phases 1 and 2: Complete**

- Created acute care capacity and acute care utilization teams
- Established 1-800 line and virtual clinic
- Created more capacity in surgical, ambulatory care, medical imaging and lab
- Closed adult care centres and postponed respite care (care plans being updated)
- Shifted visitor policy
- Completed policy on working remotely
- Completed inventory of non-clinical staff who could be redeployed
- Reviewed pharmacy process, protocols, and business continuity
- Developed algorithms for emergency departments
- Established patient transport office 24/7, and associated protocols
- Updated protocols for kidney, cancer and cardiac care
- Developed protocols for contact tracing, case management, and self-monitoring
- Completed initial round of public materials and messaging, including daily staff digests, daily physician updates, weekly leadership memos, and weekly stakeholder updates
- Updated environmental cleaning
- Reassessed protocols for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Held tabletop exercises for emergency department presentations and inpatient admissions
- Inventoried capacity for acute care and long-term care
• Shifting to essential community services
• Creating public health response teams
• Reviewing ground transport
• Working with the Provincial Lab Agency to add testing lab equipment to the North
• Bolstering patient transport capacity
• Stabilizing supply chain for personal protective equipment (PPE)
• Modeling to inform ventilator distributions
• Forming local emergency operations committees
• Finalizing critical care plan for implementation – intubation, ventilation, negative pressure rooms, locations
• Creating inpatient areas to cohort those with respiratory symptoms
• Establishing separate emergency room triage areas for those with respiratory symptoms
• Establishing critical care clinical consultation and support team with clear process for accessing service
• Finalizing COVID-19 ethics framework and consultation service
Please note the following NH service changes:

**Northern Health Connections bus**

Due to the current COVID-19 situation, Northern Health Connections will be restricting passenger travel. As NH connections largely serves an at-risk demographic, we are only offering travel for essential medical appointments. Individuals who are mid-trip and have a paid return ticket before March 22, 2020 can still use Northern Health Connections to return home.

Northern Health Connections will also not be accepting any walk-on passengers, with no exceptions.

All bookings must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

**Visitor access to NH facilities**

Until further notice, the following visitor restrictions are now in place in hospitals long-term care homes, and assisted living facilities:

- ONE (1) adult caregiver/support person (exceptions may be made for Neonatal ICU & Inpatient Pediatric, with routine precautions and in consultation with infection prevention & control)
- We will accommodate patient and family needs and consult with infection prevention & control for Palliative/end of life areas

**Laboratory services**

As we move into outbreak response Phase 2, hospitals will shift to providing only necessary laboratory services.

Outpatient testing will be reduced to only essential tests for certain patient groups, and outpatient collection hours will be reduced to limit the number of outpatients entering the hospital, while allowing for physical distancing of those requiring outpatient lab testing

Hospitalized and emergency patients will receive testing without interruption.
Temporary suspension of outpatient Hepatitis C testing

The BCCDC performs all Northern Health’s Hepatitis C testing; however, they are also currently performing high volumes of COVID-19 testing.

To free up testing capacity for COVID-19 tests, non-urgent outpatient Hepatitis C serology, viral load and genotype testing will be suspended immediately, with reassessment on April 17/2020.

Testing will continue to be performed for hospitalized and emergent patients and for organ donation.

Cardiac services

British Columbia’s health authorities have been directed to move all hospitals within the province to Outbreak Response Phase 2. This mandates shifting all hospitals towards prioritizing only urgent and emergent cardiac procedures, diagnostic testing and clinic outpatient visits. All non-urgent scheduled cardiac procedures, diagnostic testing or appointments will be postponed. Further, Northern Health cardiac program has developed an operational plan to serve as guiding policy for Cardiac Services across the Northern Health region, in alignment with recent Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommendations and the outbreak response phase.

Temporary suspension of pay parking at Northern Health sites

In an effort to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, Northern Health is temporarily suspending pay parking for the public, staff, and medical staff, effective April 1 through April 30, 2020.

Northern Health’s only public pay-parking site in the region is at the University Hospital of Northern BC (UHNBC) in Prince George. Northern Health is working with IMPark, the parking services provider at UHNBC, to implement this change to public and staff parking immediately.

Pay parking machines require people to touch screens and buttons that may have been touched by someone previously. Discontinuing the use of pay parking machines reduces the risk of potential spread of infection and also supports physical distancing measures that have been mandated by the Provincial Health Officer.
We are extremely grateful for the many offers we’ve received from individuals and organizations who want to donate protective equipment, financial support, and time to our health care workers and hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q Can I donate items to Northern Health?

Yes. If you wish to donate any items, please email the details to ppe.donation@northernhealth.ca so we can better manage these requests and determine if the item(s) can be used in a healthcare setting.

Please note donated items must be unused and unopened, and unfortunately we are not accepting homemade items at this time. Please do not drop off items at any NH facilities without permission.

Q Can I make a financial donation?

Yes. Financial donations can still be made to your local health care foundation or auxiliary. Information about your local foundation or auxiliary is found here: www.northernhealth.ca/about-us/get-involved/hospital-foundations-auxiliaries#hospital-foundations-and-societies
If you have any questions or concerns, call the COVID-19 Online Clinic and Information Line for Northern BC residents at 1-844-645-7811.

As well, the BC COVID-19 Support app is now available on the Apple App Store and Google Play (for Android). You can self-assess for COVID-19, and the app will also send you the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts.

Also, BC has a self-assessment website – bc.thrive.health – to help people decide whether they need assessment or testing for COVID-19.

To order posters to put up in your community, visit the Northern Health website: www.northernhealth.ca/health-topics/coronavirus-information-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-resources

A selection of posters can be found following this section.

**Trusted websites:**

- www.northernhealth.ca/health-topics/coronavirus-information-covid-19
- www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19
- www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/common-questions
- www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses
- www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/translated-content
PRINTABLE POSTERS AND CARDS

The following section contains printable posters and cards. For additional digital resources and to order posters to put up in your community, visit the Northern Health website: www.northernhealth.ca/health-topics/coronavirus-information-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-resources
Do you have symptoms including: fever, sore throat, cough, sneezing, difficulty breathing?

IF YES

Do you have shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chest pain, feeling confused, having a hard time waking up? Please go to your health care facility.
THIS IS AN EMERGENCY

If you don’t have severe symptoms, go home. YOUR SYMPTOMS ARE NOT AN EMERGENCY.
Call the NH COVID-19 Online & Information line at 1-844-645-7811

Remember to wash your hands and practice social distancing at all times.

Northern Health COVID-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: 1-844-645-7811
BC Govt. COVID-19 Helpline: 1-888-COVID19 or 1-888-268-4319
How to Talk to Your Friends About COVID-19

Here’s what you can say:

### Stay informed

Use trusted sources for up-to-date information, travel advisories and other updates:

- **BC Centre for Disease Control**
  bccdc.ca

- **Northern Health**
  northernhealth.ca

- **Public Health Agency of Canada**
  canada.ca/en/public-health

- **World Health Organization**
  who.int

The Public Health Agency of Canada has created a toll-free phone number (1-833-784-4397) to answer questions from Canadians about novel coronavirus.

### Practice good hygiene

“Wash your hands like you’ve been chopping jalapeños and you need to change your contacts.”
- Dr. Bonnie Henry, BC’s Provincial Health Officer

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water
- Use hand sanitizer after touching surfaces
- Avoid touching your face
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Avoid others who are unwell and stay home when you are sick

### Know the signs and symptoms

- **Cough**
- **Sneezing**
- **Sore throat**
- **Fever**
- **Difficulty breathing**

### Follow the proper procedures

If you suspect you or someone in your close contacts has a COVID-19 infection, **CALL** ahead before seeking care

- Call your family physician and explain your concern. This ensures that the clinic is prepared to test you, if needed, and keeps the clinic’s staff and other visitors safe.
- No family doctor? Call 8-1-1. Nurses at 8-1-1 can assess your risk and provide instructions.

### Protect patient privacy

Our commitment to patient privacy and confidentiality is imperative.

Our public health response is most effective when people can trust that when they come forward and contact us for help, they will get the care they need to protect themselves and those around them.

We are committed to being as open as possible, while protecting patient privacy.

NH Covid-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: 1-844-645-7811
BC Govt. COVID-19 Helpline: 1-888-COVID19 or 1-888-268-4319
Hello! If you’re self-isolating, I can help.

My name is: 

I live locally at: 

My phone number is: 

If you’re self-isolating due to COVID-19, I can help with:

- Picking up shopping
- Posting mail
- A friendly phone call
- Urgent Supplies

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is contagious. Please take every precaution to ensure you are spreading only kindness. Avoid physical contact (2 meters distance). Wash your hands regularly. Items should be left on doorstep.
Coronavirus (COVID-19)