



## Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) information for patients with chronic health conditions

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The best source of up-to-date information on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in British Columbia is the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC): [www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca). This document provides answers to additional questions from patients with chronic conditions.

### Q1. Which patients are 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. Current information suggests that older people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and lung disease are at 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.
- It is advisable that if you are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications, follow general preventative strategies against infection, and should you become ill, seek medical help early.

### Q2. How can I avoid getting sick with COVID-19?

- The way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is the same as what you probably already do to avoid influenza, colds and other illnesses. The most important thing you can do to prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face.
- Washing your hands properly means using soap and water and washing for at least 20 seconds. You can also use hand sanitizer with alcohol (60-90%) in it. However, if your hands have dirt or food or anything else on them, you should use soap and water because hand sanitizer may not work.
- If you have to cough or sneeze, try to do it into your elbow or a tissue, and then wash your hands afterwards. Stay away from other people who are ill. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others.

### Q3. Will wearing a mask protect me from being infected?

- Our advice for patients with chronic health conditions is the same as for others. Masks should be used by sick people to prevent transmission to other people. A mask will help keep a person's droplets in.
- It may be less effective to wear a mask in the community when a person is not sick themselves. Masks may give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask).

### Q4. Should I still go to my medical appointments?

- It's important to ensure you continue to receive medical care for your chronic conditions. If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness (fever, cough, sore throat, feeling unwell), call ahead to let your health care providers know so that care can be provided for you in a way that is safe for other patients.

**Q5. Should I have medication and other supplies on hand in case I can't go out to pick up more?**

- The Public Health Agency of Canada has issued guidance for all Canadians on preparedness and COVID-19 (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html>). If possible, it is prudent to have at least a two-week supply of your medications on hand.

**Q6. Should I avoid crowds? Should I stay in my home and avoid going out?**

- If there is widespread local transmission of COVID-19 in a community, people with certain chronic conditions (particularly people on medications that suppress the immune system) may consider "protective self-separation." This is a term that means staying separate from other people as much as possible. For many people, staying at home for long periods will not be an option. If there is widespread local transmission of COVID-19, people with chronic conditions should consider reducing their exposure to large gatherings, particularly those where they will be in close contact with others.

**Q7. Should I change my travel plans in the next few months because of COVID-19?**

- Health Canada travel advisories should be consulted before any travel for people with chronic conditions (<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notice>).
- Remember that the risks of travel to other countries affected by COVID-19 include being subject to public health measures (such as quarantine or travel restrictions). Travellers may also have difficulties accessing routine care due to high numbers of patients seeking care. If you are considering traveling, make sure to check your travel medical insurance coverage regarding restrictions.
- If you develop symptoms of a respiratory illness after returning from travel, make sure to call ahead before seeking health care so that steps can be taken to prevent it spreading to others. Tell your health care provider about your travel history.

**Q8. Where can I get more information?**

- You can find trustworthy information about COVID-19 by visiting the website of the BC Centre for Disease Control: [www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca)
- The Public Health Agency of Canada has set up a telephone information line about COVID-19. It can be reached by calling 1-833-784-4397.
- In British Columbia, you can receive health advice in 130 languages by dialling 8-1-1.