

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)

An update from Dr. Joyce Lock, MOH

Messaging Related to the Wise Use of Health Care Resources

March 16, 2020

What can each of us do to prevent the spread and support our valuable health care system.

COVID-19 is top of mind for everyone. And it should be. It's very important that we're informed and following the advice of health care professionals right here in Canada and those learning about this virus across the globe.

The constant information can also make us feel anxious or scared or unsure of where to turn next. If we have a cough or feel unwell, it's natural that we start to consider whether we have come into contact with the virus. The question is, how do we keep ourselves and our families safe but not overwhelm the health care system unnecessarily?

What you should do:

Encourage Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene

- Wash our hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cough into your sleeve/elbow.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, and then throw out the tissue and wash your hands immediately.
- Stay home when we are sick. Remain at home until 24 – 48 hours after symptoms have subsided.

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- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly (doorknobs, computers, phones, light switches, faucets, etc.)

Please note, there is little value in wearing masks if you are well. Please save these for people who are unwell and need them.

Stay at Home. Practice Social Distancing

- The Government of Canada recommends that Canadians not travel abroad or by cruise ship. The Canadian border will be closed to most international travellers and Canadians who are travelling are asked to return home as quickly as they can.
- Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams, recommends that you not meet in groups of larger than 50 people. This has been made easier for many of us with the closure of many schools, community programs, businesses, etc. Consider working from home.
- Take this a step further by limiting your contact with people outside of your household, shopping less often, and intentionally putting distance between yourself and others when you are out in public.

These steps can feel difficult and uncomfortable – even lonely. They are, however, our best chance of “flattening the curve” and lowering the intense pressure on our health care system. Make sure to reach out by phone or through social media to check in on your friends and family members.

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Accessing Health Care

Updated with the latest information from Dr. David Williams, CMOH, March 16, 2020, 8:27pm

If you do not have any symptoms of COVID-19

If you believe you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms, **self-monitor** for a period of 14 days. This means that, in addition to social distancing, you should track how you feel. You should take your temperature daily and log any other symptoms that develop (e.g., sore throat, new cough). You can share these records with your primary care provider over the phone if you seek assessment services.

All persons over 70 years of age and individuals who are immunocompromised are advised to **self-isolate** for a period of 14 days. This means that you should only leave your home or see other people for essential reasons. Where possible, you should seek services over the phone or internet or ask for help from friends, family or neighbours with essential errands.

If you have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days

If you have travelled and are not a healthcare worker or another essential service worker, **self-isolate** for 14 days since your arrival in Canada. People who are self-isolating should not go to work.

In addition:

- Workers who have travelled and are part of workplaces that are essential to daily living are able to return to work as long as they are asymptomatic. However, they should **self-monitor** for a period of 14 days and identify themselves to their employer so that a plan can be put into place to ensure the protection of those workplaces.
- Children under the age of 16 years who have travelled outside of Canada should also **self-isolate** for a period of 14 days. Parents should actively monitor their children's symptoms.

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Children who are self-isolating should stay at home and avoid social gathering points such as community centres or parks.

Public Health Ontario has excellent [fact sheets](#) on how to self monitor and self isolate.

If you start to feel symptoms of COVID-19

Anyone who begins to feel unwell (fever, new cough or difficulty breathing) should **self-isolate** immediately. People who are self-isolating should seek clinical assessment over the phone - either through TeleHealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000) or by calling their primary care provider's office. If you need additional assessment, your primary care provider or TeleHealth will direct you to in-person care options. If you are in medical distress and need urgent care, you should call 911 and let them know what you are self-isolating because of COVID-19.

For up-to-date COVID-19 information call our infectious diseases team at 1-800-922-0096 (prompt #9) or visit our community [Q & A](#).