Coronavirus



What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold.

A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The severe diseases have included:

- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) (first reported in 2012, all cases have been linked to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula)
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV)

In late 2019, a coronavirus was identified in China (Wuhan City), and was initially known as 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). An illness was reported on December 31st, 2019, and confirmation of the coronavirus identification occurred on January 7th, 2020. Formally, the disease is now known as coronavirus disease or COVID-19. The virus causing the disease is known as “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2” (SARS-CoV-2).

What is the current status of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

This document will discuss general precautions a workplace can take to help lower the spread of coronaviruses. For updates on the COVID-19 pandemic, please see:

- in Canada: Government of Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada) – Coronavirus disease (COVID 2019): Outbreak update
- the USA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- for world reports: World Health Organization – Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

What can workplace management do?

Do everything possible, under the circumstances, to protect the health and safety of workers and customers by providing adequate information, education/training, cleaning and disinfecting, and recommending measures such as non-medical masks or personal protective equipment, as appropriate.

Workplaces should have a policy in place that outlines their requirements when people may be sick or absent to care for others. This policy should indicate how to notify the workplace, and if and when there is a requirement for a doctor’s note and when. Organizations may wish to suspend the need for a doctor’s or medical note for the absence to reduce the burden on the health care system.

During a pandemic, businesses may be forced to close or to operate using low-contact methods. Allow workers to work remotely where possible. Assess each individual or job role to determine who or what tasks can be performed remotely.

Keep records of who was present at the workplace each day. If a worker or client is confirmed to have COVID-19, consult with public health for guidance on next steps.

Encourage physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette at all times.

Screening methods such as checklists and temperature checks may be used when workers report to work. Use a screening questionnaire from a public health agency, and remind workers to stay at home if they have symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild.

Pandemics often occur in waves, meaning periods of higher restrictive measures may tighten or loosen in response to local infection rates.

Monitor the situation by visiting the organizations listed above for more information.

Workplaces can help by having an infection control plan which includes details such as:

- Using physical distancing methods to maintain at least 2 metres (6 feet) between people. Methods include signs, posters, crowd control stanchions, room dividers, and floor markings.
- Installing properly sized and positioned physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass) when physical distancing is not possible. Barriers should be disinfected daily. Barriers should be of a size and position that will prevent exposure of respiratory droplets between people. Do not use items that have gaps or holes (such as plants or trolleys). Do not create tripping hazards or “blind spot” areas when setting up barriers.
- Using physical distancing techniques, such as maintaining at least 2 metre (6 foot) distance at all times, using all available communication technologies (e.g., telephone, teleconferencing, or ,online/cloud solutions) to conduct as much business as possible (including within the same building), allow workers to work from home, or to work flexible hours to avoid peak public transportation times or crowding the workplace.
- Promoting the use of well constructed, well fitting non-medical masks or personal protective equipment as appropriate and acceptable to your workplace, workers, and customers. Consider any current recommendations from public health or other authorities when determining these measures.
- Providing clean hand washing facilities, with soap, water and disposable towels.
- Offering alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) when regular washing facilities are not available (or to people on the road).
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched or shared surfaces, spaces, and objects often, including lunchrooms, wash rooms, etc. Clean and disinfect touch points and surfaces such as doorknobs, handles, railings, kettles, etc. more often with household disinfectants or bleach solution (5 millilitres (mL) of (5%) bleach per 250 mL of water). Use a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN). This number means that it has been approved for use in Canada.
- Disinfecting all high-touch electronic devices (keyboards, tablets, smartboards, printers) with alcohol or disinfectant wipes, if the device can withstand liquids (check the owner’s manual).
- Making sure that any person required to clean and disinfect has received the appropriate training and uses any required personal protective equipment. The area where the cleaner is used should also be adequately ventilated.
- Providing boxes of tissues and encourage their use.
- Providing equipment, tools or communication devices for individual use. If items are shared, they must be cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Reminding staff to not share cups, glasses, dishes, and cutlery. Be sure all items are washed in soap and water after use.

- Removing magazines and papers from waiting areas or common rooms (such as tea rooms and kitchens).
- Making sure ventilation systems are working properly, have been maintained according to manufacturer's recommendation, and have been adjusted to provide the maximum air exchanges per hour.
- Cleaning a person's workstation or other areas, especially where they have been if a person has been suspected or identified with an infection (e.g., use a disinfectant wipe).
- Offering services that used methods of low contact, such as online ordering, online or phone check-in, delivery, curbside pick up, or by using phone or video instead of meeting in person.
- Do not offer services that involve close person to person proximity (e.g., garment fittings), unless you are using rigorous methods to minimize the chance of transmission (e.g., dentist, massage therapist) or are an essential service (e.g., police, paramedic).
- Do not hold activities such as buffet style drinks or food, valet services, face-to-face meetings, large gatherings, or conferences.

How does a coronavirus spread?

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they usually have an animal origin. For example, investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans, and MERS-CoV was transmitted from dromedary camels to humans.

In some cases, the coronavirus can evolve further and spread from person-to-person. The route of transmission is not always known, but these viruses are generally thought to spread by airborne respiratory droplets and aerosols between people who are in close contact.

SARS-CoV-2 spreads by:

- respiratory droplets and aerosols generated when you cough, sneeze, breath, sing, or shout
- close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands

Regulators states that with SARS-CoV-2, person to person spread does occur when there is close contact.

What is meant by "close contact"?

Generally speaking, examples of close contact include:

- Having cared for or lived with a person known to have the virus, including being within 2 metres (6 feet) or within the room or care area of a person with the virus
- Direct contact with droplets from coughing or sneezing by someone affected by the virus
- When a person touches a surface contaminated with infection and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes

What are symptoms of infection from coronavirus?

Each coronavirus will vary in the severity of infection it causes. COVID-19 is known to cause a variety of symptoms with the result being a range that includes both a very mild illness, or it may be fatal to others. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

COVID-19 presents with fever and symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or difficulty breathing). Common symptoms include:

- new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- temperature equal to or over 38°C
- feeling feverish
- chills
- fatigue or weakness
- muscle or body aches
- new loss of smell or taste
- headache
- gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting)
- feeling very unwell

There is also evidence indicates that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can be transmitted by someone who is infected but not showing symptoms, including people who

- have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic)
- never develop symptoms (asymptomatic)

Diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection is determined by medical test as well as the person’s exposure history.

Which occupations are at risk?

People caring for individuals with COVID-19 are at the greatest risk for contracting the disease such as health care workers in acute care hospitals, rehabilitation hospitals, mental health hospitals, long term care facilities, emergency departments, and others who work in close contact with their clients or patients.

Persons living with individuals with COVID-19 may also be at risk for contracting the disease. Individuals who are older (over 65), or who have underlying medical conditions or compromised immune systems are at higher risk of developing serious disease outcomes from COVID-19.

What are the recommendations to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus?

Recommendations from Regulators to the public to prevent the spread of infection include:

- Get the COVID-19 vaccine when it is made available to you.
- Avoid closed spaces, crowded places, close contact settings, and close-range conversation or settings where there is:
    - singing
    - shouting
    - heavy breathing (for example, during exercise)
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms
- Stay home and away from others if you feel sick
- Only travel when it is essential
- Wear a well constructed and fitting non-medical mask or face covering when you are in:
    - public and you might come into close contact with others
    - shared indoor spaces with people from outside your immediate household
- Keep the number of people you have prolonged contact with as small as possible.
- Stick to a small and consistent social circle and avoid gathering in large groups.
- Talk to your employer about working at home if possible.
- Limit contact with those at risk of more severe illness, such as:
    - older adults
    - those with underlying medical conditions
    - those with compromised immune systems

- Do not neglect your own personal care, take time to exercise (preferably outdoors), and monitor your mental health. Maintain a strong social support network and seek help when you need it.
- Maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres from people outside of your household.
    - Household contacts (people you live with) don’t need to distance from each other unless they’re sick or have travelled in the last 14 days.
- Have good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
    - Frequently clean your hands by using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or if soap and water isn’t available alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol)
    - When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands
    - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands

The general guidelines for public and most workplaces (non-healthcare) are outlined in the following documents:

- Hand Washing: Reducing the Risk of Common Infections
- Good Hygiene Practices – Reducing the Spread of Infections and Viruses

Know the appropriate procedures for general sanitation and infection control, and how to work safely with hazardous products, including bleach.

If using gloves when cleaning, always wear the appropriate type of glove for the product you are using. The appropriate type of glove material will be listed on that product’s safety data sheet (SDS). If this information is missing, contact the supplier or manufacturer of the product. Manufacturers of chemical protective gloves and clothing may also assist their customers in making appropriate choices.

What are measures that can be taken in workplaces that provide health care?

For health care workplaces, the following precautions should help prevent transmission.

For example, guidance for health care workplaces is outlined in the document “Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): For health professionals” from Regulators. There are infection prevention and control measures for various health care settings including acute care, long-term care, homecare, and outpatient and ambulatory care.

Measures may include:

- Conducting risk assessments, including a point-of-care assessment
- Following routine practices, including hand hygiene
- Establishing triage and facility access points
- Conducting active screening
- Requiring all staff and visitors to wear a medical mask, as necessary
- Providing information to staff, visitors, and patients
- Providing education and training to all staff
- Establishing procedures for personal protective equipment, including gloves, gowns, masks/respirators, and eye protection as necessary
- Establishing procedures to manage exposures or when signs and symptoms are noted
- Developing procedures to manage wastes, linens, cleaning, and other aspects of the work environment
- Limiting visitors as appropriate
- Monitoring and evaluating procedures and processes for continual improvement

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