



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

## ABOUT COVID-19 - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold. They may include coughing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing.

### How is COVID-19 spread?

Coronavirus is transmitted via larger liquid droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. The virus can enter via these droplets through the eyes, nose or throat if you are in close contact. The liquid droplets quickly fall to the ground or land on surfaces that an infected person touches. The liquid droplets do not linger in the air. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

### Who is most at risk?

Elders and people with chronic health or respiratory conditions are most at risk of becoming very ill if they contract COVID-19 and possibly dying.

### Is there a vaccine?

No. It generally takes 12 to 18 months to develop a vaccine for a new disease and to produce enough for populations.

## PROTECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19

### What can I do to prevent infection?

The most important thing you can do to prevent infection is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Using soap and water is the single most effective way of reducing the spread of infection. If a sink is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clean your

hands as long as they are not visibly soiled. If hands are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clean them.

### Can I still wash my hands if my community has a boil water advisory?

Yes, it's safe to wash your hands with soap if you are living in a community with a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) or a Do Not Consume (DNC) advisory. However, if you are living with a Do Not Use (DNU) advisory you should wash with bottled water. For more information about water advisories, see: <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health/drinking-water-advisories>

### What can I use to disinfect and kill germs?

Regular household cleaners are effective for removing germs. You may also use a solution of one part bleach mixed with nine parts water to disinfect areas that are touched often such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables. If you have COVID-19, it is important to use bleach to disinfect, especially if you are sharing any common areas (such as a bathroom) with others or if others will be entering the room where you are staying.

### Is vinegar mixed with water an effective disinfectant?

Probably not. Vinegar is an acetic acid and, although acids will inactivate viruses, a vinegar/water mixture is quite weak and the pH is probably not low enough.

### What should I do if I have to cough or sneeze?

Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. This is called good respiratory hygiene.

### **Can COVID-19 be transmitted through the food we eat?**

COVID-19 doesn't appear to be transmitted by eating food contaminated with the virus, however, it is important to wash your hands before preparing or eating food. For more, see [Food Safety](#) on the BCCDC COVID-19 website and the FNHA article [Remember that food is medicine](#).

### **What is the best way to protect myself, my loved ones and my community during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The FNHA recommends physical distancing, forgoing usual greetings (such as handshakes, hugs, kisses etc.), avoiding all social gatherings, and staying home if you are experiencing any signs of illness, even if they are mild symptoms.

If you are coughing or sneezing, always cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue. Throw the tissue into a closed bin immediately after use. Clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or with soap and warm water after you cough or sneeze. Do the same when you are caring for a loved one that is sick.

### **Will a facemask help?**

Facemasks have not been proven to protect the person wearing the mask. Masks should be worn by sick people to prevent transmission of COVID-19 to other people. A mask will help keep a person's droplets in. Masks can provide some protection to others around you when physical distancing is difficult to maintain i.e., in grocery stores, on public transit etc.

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).

Note that medical facemasks should be reserved for healthcare workers, first responders and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients. They will wear medical masks, eye protection and gowns in order to protect themselves and their patients.

[More about safely using facemasks and how to make your own here](#) (FNHA information page)

### **What is physical distancing?**

Physical distancing means protecting our personal space. The current recommendation is to stay at

least two metres (six feet) away from other people. This means that we do not use usual greetings, such as handshakes, hugs, and kisses. Safe greetings include a wave, a nod, or a bow.

### **Why is physical distancing important?**

When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain the virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease. Avoiding physical contact while greeting friends, family and community members helps to prevent COVID-19 from spreading to the people we care about.

Due to the unprecedented risk presented by COVID-19, physical distancing is essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All of us must take responsibility to care for each other by keeping our physical distance.

## **TRAVEL AND EVENTS**

### **Should I still attend events and/or travel within BC?**

No, you should not. With the increasing evidence about the rapid spread of COVID-19 in British Columbia, and on the advice of public health physicians, the FNHA strongly recommends against any non-essential travel. The FNHA also recommends against attendance at any events or social gatherings. For more information, read this [FNHA advisory](#).

### **Why should I avoid public gatherings?**

Attending even small gatherings increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. This increases the chance of participants becoming infected and carrying the virus into their communities and passing it on to vulnerable friends and family, particularly Elders and people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, and compromised immune systems.

We understand people will be disappointed at the postponement of events and travel plans but our common priority now is to slow the spread of the disease, contain the chain of transmission, and protect our most vulnerable family and community members from illness and possibly death.

### **Is it safe to participate in cultural gatherings (e.g., sweat lodges, potlatches, ceremonies and other gatherings)?**

The FNHA acknowledges the significance of cultural gatherings in our communities and the lingering negative memories and trauma caused by the banning of cultural activities in the past.

It is no longer safe to participate in cultural gatherings due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in BC. The FNHA recommends the immediate cancellation or postponement of all cultural events.

As an alternative, you could modify your cultural practice or ceremony to ensure physical distancing of at least two metres (six feet). You could also conduct ceremonies with only family members who live in the same household (and have a larger event later), or consider an alternative such as a FaceTime event.

The FNHA advises that you temporarily suspend traditional practices like sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies. Doing a sweat and being near others who are sweating could easily lead to transmission of the virus to others. And there is a strong likelihood during a pipe ceremony of transmitting the virus via saliva when the pipe is passed from one person to the next.

For more information, read this [FNHA advisory](#).

### **If community members are travelling, how do we know that they aren't bringing the virus back?**

Community members should seek to minimize interaction with other people and practice physical distancing, including while travelling, even though this can be difficult. The FNHA recommends that all travel be assessed to determine if it is truly essential. Postponing events and travel whenever possible will support individual and community health and minimize the spread of the virus. When travelling, people need to be extra diligent with preventative practices such as hand washing often, using hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, and avoiding touching the face.

## **SELF-ISOLATION**

### **What is self-isolation?**

Self-isolation means staying at home and not going to work or school.

### **How long do I need to be in self-isolation?**

- If you have no symptoms but may have been exposed to the virus, you need to self-isolate for 14 days from the date of possible exposure.
- If you are experiencing symptoms, you need to self-isolate for at least 10 days from the date of the onset of symptoms. If you are still having symptoms at 10 days, continue self-isolation until you are symptom-free. Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean you need to continue to self-isolate beyond 10 days.

### **I am infected and I live with other people. How do I self-isolate?**

Stay and sleep in a room with good airflow that is away from others. Use a separate bathroom if you can. If you are in the same room with anyone, avoid face-to-face contact and wear a homemade face-mask. Learn how to make a homemade mask [here](#). Note that medical facemasks should be reserved for healthcare workers, first responders and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients. Do not share towels or face cloths. Friends and family can drop off food outside your room or home. If you live with an Elder or someone with a chronic health condition, it would be best if those people could stay in the home of other family or friends in the community.

### **What happens if someone in my community is infected?**

If someone in the community is infected, they must self-isolate. People who were in close contact with that person (i.e. people living in the same household) should also self-isolate for 14 days.

### **What happens if one person in my household is infected but no one else has symptoms?**

The whole household must self-isolate for 14 days to prevent the spread of the virus to anyone outside of your household.

## **TESTING**

### **How do I get tested for COVID-19?**

Testing is available for all who need it. If symptoms appear, even if they are mild, you are eligible for a COVID-19 test. Please self-isolate and call your health care provider or 8-1-1 for guidance. You can use this easy [self-assessment tool](#) from the Province of B.C. to help determine whether you or a loved one need further assessment or testing for COVID-19.

### **Are there COVID-19 test kits that First Nations can access?**

COVID-19 is tested using a standard swab (long Q-tip that scrapes cells from the very back of the nose or throat). These swabs are then sent to a laboratory for testing. Click on the links below for a list of collection centres in the province to find one near you. You can also call 8-1-1 or your Community Health Nurse to find the nearest centre.

[Collection centre finder](#) (Mobile and desktop)

[Collection centre finder](#) (Internet Explorer users)

### **What are the next steps if I am infected or think that I may be infected or if I've been around someone who is infected?**

- Ensure that you self-isolate immediately and avoid contact with others. This means staying away from others as much as possible.
- Wash your hands or use alcohol-based sanitizer frequently.
- Use good hygiene practices such as coughing or sneezing into a disposable tissue or into your elbow.
- Clean high-touch areas such as toilets, bedside tables and door handles with diluted bleach (one-part bleach to nine parts water) or a household disinfectant.
- If you are experiencing symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing, contact your healthcare provider or call 8-1-1 for guidance.
- If your symptoms are severe, such as shortness of breath or chest pain, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest Emergency Department
- Call ahead before you get medical care. By calling ahead, you help the clinic, hospital, lab, urgent care or doctor's office prepare for your visit and stop the spread of germs.

## **MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION**

### **What is the FNHA policy on non-necessary medical travel from remote communities to larger centres like Vancouver?**

All medical transportation for routine appointments is currently unavailable. Routine appointments include, but are not limited to, regular dentist

appointments, eye exams, non-urgent specialist appointments, or diagnostic tests.

### **Will the FNHA cover me if I need to travel for an urgent medical appointment?**

Yes, medical transportation is available for urgent appointments that cannot be postponed. Urgent appointments include, but are not limited to, pre-natal confinement, dialysis, or cancer treatment.

- All medical transportation for urgent appointments must be submitted as a Benefit Exception request to Health Benefits.
- Clients should submit their Benefit Exception requests to their local patient travel clerk or to Health Benefits by calling **1-855-550-5454**.

If the Benefits Exception request is approved, medical transportation will be arranged.

### **I've been told I need to be tested for COVID-19. Can I get help with transportation to receive testing?**

To allow for clients in the greatest need to access emergency transportation, and to promote social distancing, we ask clients to use their own transportation if it is possible to do so. If you have called 8-1-1 and been told that you need testing for COVID-19, and you cannot get to the testing location on your own, please call the BC Ambulance non-emergency line at 604-872-5151 for help travelling to the testing location.

### **If someone travels for a medical appointment and then has to quarantine while away, will FNHA cover the cost of accommodation?**

If you are told to self-isolate while attending an urgent medical appointment approved by Health Benefits, medical transportation will be arranged by Health Benefits on a case-by-case basis. Special travel arrangements will make sure that you stay isolated, where possible.

### **Will the FNHA be able to support clients with hotel accommodation if individuals need to be isolated?**

Yes, in certain situations. If you need to self-isolate and have a household member with a weak immune system, chronic medical condition or who is an especially vulnerable senior, the at-risk household member can request Medical Transportation benefits to stay elsewhere.

- All medical transportation for at-risk household member(s) must be submitted as a Benefit Exception request to Health Benefits.
- Submit Benefit Exception requests to your local patient travel clerk or to Health Benefits by calling **1-855-550-5454**.

### **Will the FNHA be able to support household members of clients diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay elsewhere?**

Yes. If a client has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and been told to recover at home, their household members can request MT benefits to stay elsewhere.

- All medical transportation for the client's household member(s) must be submitted as a Benefit Exception request to Health Benefits.
- Clients should submit their Benefit Exception requests to their local patient travel clerk or to Health Benefits by calling **1-855-550-5454**.

## **PHARMACY SERVICES**

### **I need to refill or fill a new prescription. Can my medication be delivered to me?**

Some pharmacies may be able to deliver medications to you. If you have a new prescription or are due for a refill, call your pharmacy ahead of time to ask about options. Please view this [bulletin from the BC Pharmacy Association](#) on how your pharmacist can help.

### **Does taking Ibuprofen make COVID-19 symptoms worse?**

Ibuprofen is the main ingredient in some popular pain relievers like Advil® and Motrin®. At this time, both the World Health Organization and Health Canada say that there is no scientific evidence that links ibuprofen to the worsening of COVID-19 symptoms. If you are worried about taking ibuprofen, talk to your local nurse, doctor or pharmacist about other pain relief options. Call 8-1-1 if you start to experience symptoms of COVID-19.

## **MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION**

### **Should I buy toilet paper?**

You should stock your household with essential supplies in case you are asked to or want to self-isolate. However, it's not necessary to stockpile large quantities of toilet paper or any other supplies. This only creates supply issues for everyone.

### **Can the virus live on clothes?**

Yes, the virus can survive on porous surfaces such as skin and cloth as well as other materials and surfaces for hours to days, depending on the surface. Regular washing is recommended.

### **What is the risk for infants?**

Recent evidence does not indicate a large risk for infants – very few children under five showed serious illness from COVID-19. There has been a positive case detected, however, so they are not immune.

### **What are the risks for pregnant women?**

It is too early to determine the level of risk posed to pregnant women. COVID-19 is a new virus and information is limited. Due to the physical changes women experience during pregnancy, this may be a time when pregnant women are more likely get a virus and, if so, the symptoms may be worse than if they were not pregnant. If you are pregnant and have symptoms, please call your prenatal care provider, self-isolate, and if needed, go to the nearest hospital.

### **Can my pets get COVID-19 or be a carrier?**

There is currently no evidence that domestic animals like pets can become sick with COVID-19 or can spread the virus to people.

### **What supports are in place for remote communities that may be short-staffed or don't have access to equipment (i.e. respirators)?**

The FNHA is working with regional, provincial and federal partners in the health and health emergency management sectors to ensure that communities have access to appropriate care. If communities have specific concerns about access to care relating to COVID-19, they can connect with their FNHA Regional Team or [covid19@fnha.ca](mailto:covid19@fnha.ca)

**Are First Nations Treatment Centres still operating?**

Some treatment centres may be open but most are closed. Please telephone the treatment centre directly for details. Most treatment centres are working towards providing outreach services by phone to previous clients, as well as responding to requests for support when received. Telephone-based Health and Cultural Support is also available through these two organizations:

- **Indian Residential School Survivors Society:**  
604-985-4465 or toll-free: 1-800-721-0066
- **Tsow-Tun-Le-Lum:**  
1-250-268-2463 or toll-free: 1-888-590-3123

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**COVID-19 RESOURCES**

The FNHA:

[www.fnha.ca/coronavirus](http://www.fnha.ca/coronavirus)

BC Centre for Disease Control:

[http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel))

HealthLinkBC – 811:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-feature/coronavirus-covid-19>

Public Health Agency of Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>