

What You Need To Know If You Are At Higher Risk For Severe Illness From COVID-19

For people with chronic medical conditions

Read this brochure to learn:

- what is COVID-19
- who is at high risk
- what are the symptoms of COVID-19
- what can I do to reduce my risk of COVID-19
- what should I do if I think I have COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus first detected in late 2019. Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that can cause infections like the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Most people who develop COVID-19 will have mild symptoms. But people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of developing more severe symptoms and health problems from COVID-19 that can result in death. At this time, there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

Who is at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19?

- People over 60 years of age
- Cancer patients who:
 - have lung cancer
 - have cancers of the blood or bone marrow like leukemia or lymphoma
 - are being treated with chemotherapy, immunotherapy or other treatments that weaken the immune system
- People taking immunosuppressant medicines (medicines that suppress or weaken the immune system)
- People with diabetes
- People with heart disease
- People who have had a solid organ transplant, for example, a heart or liver transplant
- People with severe respiratory (breathing) conditions including all cystic fibrosis, high spinal cord injuries, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- People with rare diseases that increase the risk of infections such as homozygous sickle cell

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever
- a new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath, trouble breathing
- sore throat, trouble swallowing
- loss of smell or taste
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach ache
- runny nose or stuffy nose (not related to seasonal allergies)
- muscle pain or arthralgia joint pain
- eye pain or conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- headache
- severe or unusual fatigue
- an increase in falls, confusion or delirium
- if the normal symptoms of your chronic condition are getting worse

Symptoms can vary based on age and range from mild to severe. Check yourself for symptoms. Take your temperature every day and log any symptoms that develop (for example, sore throat, new cough).

If you develop a symptom, stay home and call your health care provider or local public health unit and tell them about your symptoms.

Call 911 or your local emergency help line if you develop:

- severe problems breathing (for example: cannot catch your breath, gasping for air)
- chest pain or pressure
- new confusion or trouble waking up

Inform 911 or the emergency help line that you may have COVID-19 and are at high risk for severe illness.

What can I do to reduce my risk of getting COVID-19?

Some of the best ways to reduce your risk include:

Self-isolate

All people over the age of 70 and those at higher risk should self-isolate.

Self-isolate means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people. If possible, only leave your home for medical appointments.

When self-isolating:

- Do not use public transit, taxis or rideshare.
- Do not go to work, school or any other public place.
- Avoid contact with people outside your household.
- Only have visitors you must see, such as care providers.
- Stay away from people over 60 and other persons with chronic medical conditions.
- Avoid the use of fans in indoor spaces when possible. Fans can move the virus around if it is present.
- Make sure that shared rooms have good airflow (for example, open a window).
- If these steps are not possible, stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people and wear a mask that covers your nose, mouth and chin.
- If you cannot wear a mask, other people should wear a mask when they are in the same room as you.

Always practice good hand hygiene

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water and wash for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol.

- Wash your hands:
 - before eating or touching your face
 - after using the bathroom
 - after coughing or sneezing
 - after entering your home
 - after touching surfaces commonly touched by others (for example, handrails in public spaces)

Masking Do's and Don'ts

- Wear a non-medical mask if you have to leave your home for any reason (for example, to come to the hospital or to get groceries).
- Make sure your mask is always covering your nose, mouth and chin.
- Wash your hands before putting on or removing your mask.
- Avoid touching the outside of your mask while you are wearing or removing it.
- Always use the ear loops or ties to put on and take off your mask.
- If you have a reusable face covering, be sure to wash it in between each use. Do not re-use disposable masks.
- Bandanas, neck gaiters and masks with exhale vents or valves are not approved to wear inside the hospital. Although we know they may be more comfortable to wear, they do not prevent your germs from spreading to others.
- Read more [masking DO's and DON'Ts](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Masking_Dos_Donts.pdf)
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Other precautions

- Sneeze or cough into your sleeve or use a tissue and throw it away after each use. Then wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. You could get COVID-19 if you touch a surface that has the virus on it.

- Clean and disinfect surfaces often. Be sure to clean surfaces that people touch a lot, such as doorknobs, phones, light switches and keyboards.

Keep away from people who are sick or who have travelled recently

- Avoid people who are sick.
- Avoid people who have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.

Make a plan to reduce the need to leave your house. Ask a friend, neighbour or family member to bring your supplies if possible.

- Find services that can deliver food or medicines to your door.
- Phone or order online.
- Arrange to have supplies left outside your front door to reduce contact.
 - Wash your hands after unpacking your items.
 - Rinse all fruit and vegetables.
- Do grocery shopping during off-peak hours when there are fewer people. Wear a mask and keep at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from others.
- If you have a medical appointment, ask your care team if it is possible to have a virtual visit over the telephone or a video chat.
- If you must use public transit, travel outside of the busy rush hour. Wear a mask and keep at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from others.

Have these supplies ready to ensure you do not need to leave your home:

- Ask your health care provider about extra medicine in case you need to stay home for a long time. Having extra medicine means you can also avoid going to a crowded pharmacy.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (for example, tissues) to treat fever and other symptoms in case you get sick.

Stock up on the supplies you would need if you had to stay home for a few weeks, such as groceries, pet food, and cleaning products. Plan what you will do if you become sick. Have a list of people who you can call for help with chores and errands.

Speak with loved ones and friends about what they can do to protect you.

Remind them of how important it is to:

- practice physical distancing (keeping people farther apart in person to prevent COVID-19 from spreading)
- practice good hand hygiene
- stay at home (if they do not live with you)

Family members and friends might find it hard not to visit or help. Remind them that virtual visits can work just as well. Stay connected through your phone, internet or social media.

What should I do if I think I might have COVID-19?

If you are having trouble breathing or experiencing other severe symptoms, call 911 immediately.

If you have any other symptoms of COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone who has symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should:

- self-isolate as soon as you notice symptoms
- use this [online tool to do a self-assessment](http://www.covid19toronto.ca) (<http://www.covid19toronto.ca>)
- contact your primary care provider, your local public health unit or Telehealth Ontario at 1 866 797 0000
- visit a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-have-symptoms-or-been-exposed/covid-19-assessment-centres/) (<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-have-symptoms-or-been-exposed/covid-19-assessment-centres/>)

For more information

Information about COVID-19 is changing quickly. For the most up-to-date information:

- call Telehealth Ontario: 1 866 797 000
- for information about your care at UHN Hospitals visit the [UHN COVID-19 webpage](https://www.uhn.ca/covid19) (https://www.uhn.ca/covid19)
- for general information visit the [Ontario COVID-19 webpage](https://covid-19.ontario.ca) (https://covid-19.ontario.ca)
- for the latest reliable information on your health, visit [Covid-19 Resources for Patients and Families](https://guides.hsict.library.utoronto.ca/covid19patientlibrary) (https://guides.hsict.library.utoronto.ca/covid19patientlibrary)

Access your health record online

Access your health record online through myUHN Patient Portal, a secure website for UHN patients.

With myUHN, you can access your UHN appointments, lab results, clinic notes and reports as soon as they become available from your computer, smartphone or tablet.

For more information or to get your registration code:

- call myUHN support at 416 340 3777
- [Email myUHN](mailto:myuhn@uhn.ca) (myuhn@uhn.ca)

Learn more about [myUHN Patient Portal](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN) (https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN).