



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. 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 can take years 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.

### 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.

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

The FNHA recommends social distancing, forgoing usual greetings (such as handshakes, hugs, kisses etc.), avoiding social gatherings over 50 people, 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 rub 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.

### **What is social distancing?**

Social distancing means that we do not use usual greetings, such as handshakes, hugs, and kisses. (Safe greetings include a wave, a nod, a bow and anything else you can think of that does not include physical contact.) Social distancing also includes staying one to two metres away from other people.

### **Why is social 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.

## **TRAVEL AND EVENTS**

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

The FNHA is advising all communities to avoid unnecessary travel and attendance at public gatherings of more than 50 people due to the increased risk of spreading the COVID-19 at the gathering. (The 50-person limit was set by the Provincial Health Officer March 16, down from 250 the previous week).

### **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 existing health conditions.

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.

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

As much as possible, community members should seek to minimize interaction with other people. During travel this can be difficult to control. We recommend that all travel be assessed to determine if it is essential. Postponing 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.

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

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

Even gatherings of fewer than 50 people require an assessment of risk - especially to Elders and those with chronic disease and especially if the event will entail travel and people sharing accommodations. Communities are encouraged to consider alternatives, such as holding smaller events now with the larger event at a later date. If you are holding a smaller event, consider having bag lunches rather than shared meals, ensure there are opportunities to wash and/or sanitize hands, and practice social distancing.

In terms of sweat lodges, we can't say what effect they might have on the virus because factors such as temperature and timing can't be easily controlled.

## SELF-ISOLATION

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

Self-isolation means staying at home and not going to work or school. It also means monitoring yourself for symptoms for 14 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. Wear a facemask (surgical/procedure mask) if you are in the same room with anyone and avoid face-to-face contact. 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 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 but not everyone needs a test. If you have no symptoms or mild symptoms you do not require a test. If symptoms appear, call your health care provider or 8-1-1 for guidance. The BC Centre for Disease Control has created an online self-assessment tool that is available on its website. It is also linked from [www.fnha.ca/coronavirus](http://www.fnha.ca/coronavirus)

### **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. The tests are available where influenza testing is being done. Call your health care provider or 8-1-1 for guidance. Not all people with respiratory symptoms need to be tested for COVID-19. If people develop respiratory symptoms, they should self-isolate, regardless of the availability of testing.

### **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.

## MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

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

You should stock your household with essential supplies in case you are asked to self-isolate for 14 days. However, it's not necessary to stockpile large quantities of toilet paper or any other supplies. This only creates supply issues for everyone.

### **Will a mask help?**

Masks should be used by sick people to prevent transmission to other people. A mask will help keep a person's droplets in. It is 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). Health-care workers will wear surgical masks, eye protection and gowns in order to protect themselves and their patients.

### **Q: 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.

### **Q: 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.

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

It is too early to determine the level of risk posed to pregnant women infected with COVID-19. A study of pregnant women with the coronavirus SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) found that the more severe the illness experienced by the mother, the higher the likelihood of risk to her pregnancy – including stillbirth, miscarriage and premature birth.

### **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)

## 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>