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COVID-19 coronavirus info for Albertans

Learn about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and actions being taken to protect the health of Albertans.

[Employment standards](#)[New and proposed legislation](#)

Current situation

The COVID-19 outbreak was declared a global pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). Confirmed cases: 56 in Alberta, 321 in Canada.

Effective immediately:

- Student attendance at K to 12 schools is prohibited and in-person post-secondary classes are cancelled.
- All licensed child care facilities, out-of-school care programs and preschool programs are closed indefinitely.
- New info for airline passengers, travellers, and employers
- [Complete information for Albertans](#)
- [Updates from the Chief Medical Officer](#)

Last updated: March 15 at 5:00pm



If you recently returned from travel outside Canada or have symptoms - cough, fever, fatigue or difficulty breathing:

- stay home - do not go to an ER or clinic
- take the [COVID-19 self-assessment test](#)
- call [Health Link 811](#) for testing and instructions

Current risk in Alberta

On March 15, 17 new cases were confirmed in Alberta. More concerning, 2 of the recently identified cases seem to have been acquired through community spread from an unknown source, and 7 cases occurred as a result of a single gathering in the Calgary area.

We're now moving forward with more aggressive measures to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in Alberta.

In the coming days, additional actions may be required. The health of Albertans is, and always will be, our top priority.

Cases in Alberta and Canada

Location	In Alberta	In Canada
Confirmed cases	56	321
Deaths	0	1

Testing in Alberta

Alberta is testing for COVID-19. We are acting out of an excess of caution even when the likelihood of exposure is low.

Test results	Negative	Positive
Completed tests (as of March 15)	8,831	56

About coronavirus

COVID-19 vs. Influenza

Coronaviruses

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause respiratory illness in people, ranging from mild common colds to severe illnesses.

Novel coronaviruses, like COVID-19, are new strains of the virus that have not been previously identified in humans. This means people have no immunity against it, and it has no specific vaccine or treatment.

COVID-19 vs. Flu

In some ways, COVID-19 is similar to influenza (also known as the flu), but there are also key differences.

Similarities

- Both cause respiratory disease
- Both are spread by small droplets from the nose and mouth
- Both are not spread through the air over long distances and times, unlike the measles

Differences

- COVID-19 does not appear to transmit as efficiently as influenza:
 - only people with symptoms seem to be spreading the disease
 - controlling its spread is possible when people with symptoms are isolated
- There is no specific vaccine or treatment for COVID-19.
- COVID-19 causes severe disease and mortality in more cases than the flu. On average:
 - COVID-19 has resulted in 1 to 2 deaths per 100 cases
 - Flu results in 1 death in every 1,000 flu cases

Because COVID-19 can cause serious illness, it is critical to keep it from spreading by having people with a symptoms stay home, away from others.

How it spreads

COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person spread by:

- larger droplets, like from a cough or sneeze
- touching contaminated objects or surfaces, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth

COVID-19 is not airborne and cannot spread through the air over long distances or times, like the measles.

Studies suggest that the virus generally only survives for a few hours on a surface, though it may be possible for it to survive several days under ideal conditions.

Symptoms

Symptoms

COVID-19 symptoms are similar to influenza and other respiratory illnesses. Common symptoms include:

- dry cough
- fever
- fatigue/extreme tiredness

Symptom of serious illness include:

- difficulty breathing
- pneumonia

If you have symptoms:

- stay home - do not go to an ER or clinic
- take the [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) [\[↗\]](#)
- call [Health Link 811](#) [\[↗\]](#) for instructions and testing

If you need immediate medical attention, call 911 and inform them you may have COVID-19.

Risks

Most people – about 80% – recover without needing special treatment. However, it can cause serious illness in some, and there is a risk of death in severe cases.

While we are still learning about COVID-19, serious illness appears to develop more often in people who are older or have pre-existing conditions, such as:

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- lung disease
- cancer
- diabetes

Treatment

There is no specific vaccine for COVID-19 at this time.

The virus is new and different, so needs its own vaccine – which researchers around the world are now working to develop.

Supportive care is being used to treat patients with COVID-19 and some medications are being tested to see if they can help severely ill patients.

Consult [Health Link 811](#) [\[↗\]](#) or your health care provider if you are:

- concerned about your health
- feeling ill and recently travelled to an affected area

Prevent and prepare

Tips to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses and prepare your household in case you need to self-isolate at home.



- [Help Prevent the Spread posters](#)

How to prevent the spread

The risk for Albertans remains low at this time, but that may change in the coming weeks. Public health measures are in place to quickly identify potential COVID-19 cases and prevent the infection from spreading.

Influenza and other common viruses remain the most likely cause of a respiratory infection.

Prevent the spread

All Albertans are encouraged to take personal steps to help prevent the spread.

To protect yourself and others:

- stay home and away from others if sick or in isolation
- wash hands often
- cover coughs and sneezes
- avoid touching face with unwashed hands
- avoid travel outside Canada
- [self-isolate](#) for 14 days if returning from travel outside Canada or were exposed to COVID-19

Monitor your symptoms

If you have symptoms, like a dry cough, fever, fatigue or difficulty breathing:

- stay home - do not go to an ER or clinic
- take the [COVID-19 self-assessment](#)
- call [Health Link 811](#) for instructions and testing

Wearing medical masks

Masks can be very important in certain situations.

- If you are healthy, medical masks are not recommended as they do not provide full protection and can create a false sense of security.
- If you are sick, wearing a mask helps prevent spreading the illness to other people.

This is why people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms must wear masks and wash their hands when visiting an emergency department or clinic.

Resources

- [Infection prevention and control precautions for health-care settings](#) ↓
- [Help Prevent the Spread posters](#)

How to prepare

To prepare for COVID-19, public health officials recommend that you:

Create a household action plan

- Talk with the people who need to be included in your plan.
- Meet with household members, other relatives, and friends to discuss what to do if a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in your community and what the needs of each person will be.
- Plan ways to care for those at greater risk of serious complications, such as ensuring you have sufficient medication, and determining what supplies are needed and if they can be delivered.
- Talk with your neighbours about emergency planning.
- Create a list of local organizations you can contact if you need access to information, health care services, support or resources.
- Create an emergency contact list.

Plan for self-isolation

- Practice good personal health habits and everyday preventive actions.
- Choose a room in your home you can use to separate sick household members from healthy ones.
- Choose a separate bathroom for sick individuals to use, if possible.
- Plan to clean these rooms as needed when someone is sick.
- Have 72 hours worth of food and supplies at home. We do not recommend stockpiling goods.

Plan for changes at work or school

- Be prepared if your child's school or childcare facility is temporarily closed.
- Plan for potential changes at your workplace.

- Learn about your employer's emergency operations plan.
- Ask about what sick-leave policies and work from home options are available.

Resources

- [Self-isolation information sheet](#) ↓
- [How to build an emergency kit](#)

How to self-isolate

What to do

If you need to self-isolate, follow these guidelines:

- stay home - do not attend work, school, social events or any other public gatherings
- avoid close contact with other people - especially seniors and people with chronic conditions or compromised immune systems
- watch for symptoms in yourself or a family member

Monitor your symptoms

If you have symptoms, like a dry cough, fever, fatigue or difficulty breathing:

- stay home - do not go to an ER or clinic
- take the [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) ↗
- call [Health Link 811](#) ↗ for instructions and testing

Resource

- [Self-isolation information sheet](#) ↓, (PDF, 120 KB)

How to cope

Mental health and coping

The COVID-19 pandemic can have a significant impact on Albertans' mental health. Resources are available if you, or someone you know, is struggling or needs a little extra support.




Help Line

The Mental Health Help Line is available 24/7 to provide advice and referrals to community supports near you.

- Call: [1-877-303-2642](tel:1-877-303-2642)

Online resources

For helpful advice on handling stressful situations and ways to talk to children.

- [Mental health and coping with COVID-19](#)  (CDC)
- [Talking with children about COVID-19](#)  (CDC)
- [Help in Tough Times](#)  (AHS)

Mass gathering restrictions

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alberta has implemented new public health restrictions.

Events

The following mass gatherings should be cancelled:

- Events with more than 50 attendees that involve international participants, critical infrastructure staff, seniors, or other high-risk populations.
- Large events with more than 250 attendees:
 - Includes: sporting events, conferences, places of worship, schools and post-secondary institutions
 - Does not include: grocery stores, airports, shopping centres, libraries and casinos

Events that do not meet this criteria can proceed, but risk mitigation measures must be in place, such as providing sanitizer stations, enhanced cleaning protocols and distancing between attendees.

Resource

- [Complete recommendations for mass gatherings](#)  (PDF, 32 KB)

Public health actions

Actions being taken

Alberta's public health officials are carefully monitoring the situation in Canada and around the world, and are ready to respond. They are:

- working closely with federal, provincial and territorial partners to share information and assess potential health risks
- ensuring our health system is responding effectively
- ensuring front-line health professionals have information about the virus so they can:
 - take recommended actions
 - promptly report potential cases to public health officials

- updating self-isolation and self-monitoring recommendations for returning travellers as required
- tracing all close contacts of confirmed cases, testing and isolating those who are symptomatic, and asking even those who feel well to self-isolate for 14 days after their last contact with the case

On March 15, we committed an additional \$500 million to the COVID-19 response. The new funding will ensure front-line health professionals have the tools they need for testing, surveillance and treatment of patients as the province works to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

See more [information for Albertans](#).

Info for Albertans

Effective March 12, all travellers returning from outside Canada must self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.

Info for airline passengers

Flight information

As more flights confirm passengers with COVID-19, Albertans should monitor their air travel.

Flights that have confirmed cases and the affected seats will be [posted online as information is confirmed](#) ↓. Passengers in affected seats are considered close contacts and are at risk of exposure.

- Passengers in affected seats should self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.
- Other passengers are not required to self-isolate but should monitor for symptoms

What to do

If you recently returned from outside Canada:

1. [check the list of affected flights for updates](#) ↓ (last updated March 15, 5pm)
2. [self-isolate](#) ↓ for 14 days if your seat was affected
3. [monitor for symptoms](#) ↗ such as cough, fever, fatigue or difficulty breathing
4. [call Health Link 811](#) ↗ if symptoms develop to arrange testing

Travel outside Canada is not recommended at this time. All Albertans returning from outside Canada after March 12 should self-isolate for 14 days after arrival in Canada and monitor for symptoms.

Info for travellers

Departing travellers

Travel outside Canada is not recommended for Albertans at this time. Given the rapid global spread of

Travel outside Canada is not recommended for Albertans at this time. Given the rapid global spread of COVID-19, it is no longer possible to assess health risks for the duration of the trip.

- [Public Health Agency of Canada's travel health advisories page](#)
- [World Health Organization's travel bulletins](#)

Returning travellers

Returned before March 12

- Travellers returning from Italy, Iran, China's Hubei province and the Grand Princess cruise ship should [self-isolate](#) ↓, for 14 days and monitor for symptoms
- Travellers returning from other countries outside Canada should monitor for symptoms for 14 days

Returning after March 12

- All travellers returning from outside Canada should [self-isolate](#) ↓, for 14 days and monitor for symptoms

If you develop symptoms – cough, fever or difficulty breathing – stay home and complete the [online COVID-19 self-assessment](#) ↗. Do not go to the ER or doctor's office.

Travel restriction exemptions

Exemptions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis based on measures industries are already taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

At this time, the following professions have received exemptions:

- Flight Attendants
- Pilots

Info for seniors

To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, among seniors and other vulnerable groups:

- Only essential visits to any continuing care or long-term care facility in Alberta are recommended.
- Individuals over 60 years of age and those with pre-existing health conditions are most at risk of severe symptoms from COVID-19.
- Families and friends of those in these facilities are asked to think of other ways besides visiting that they can support and encourage their loved ones through this difficult time.

Info for schools and daycares

Effective immediately, all students will no longer be attending classes in K to 12 schools until further notice.

Teachers and other school staff will still be expected work either from home or at their workplace to

Teachers and other school staff will still be expected to work either from home or at their workplace, to ensure these expectations are met. Decisions on how to do this are still to be made, and may vary depending on the school jurisdiction.

School authorities are expected to continue their regular day-to-day operations and ensure the safety of school facilities. Maintenance, capital projects, cleaning of facilities, and administrative work will continue.

- Every student will receive a final mark and students will progress to their next grade level next school year.
- Provincial assessments, such as provincial achievement tests, will be cancelled.
- At this time, diploma exams essential for post-secondary acceptance will continue.
- Every student who is eligible to graduate from Grade 12 this year will graduate.

All licensed childcare facilities, out-of-school programs and preschool programs in Alberta are closed at this time.

- Approved day homes are exempt as they care for fewer than 7 children at a time, but should use enhanced sanitation practices.

Info for post-secondary institutions

Effective immediately, in-person classes at post-secondary institutions are cancelled until further notice. Campuses remain open.

The government will also be working with post-secondary institutions to ensure that these extraordinary circumstances do not prevent students from being eligible for admission to post-secondary studies for the upcoming school year.

Info for employers and employees

Employment rules changes

We're acting quickly to protect Albertans by implementing paid, job-protected leave. Details of how these changes will take effect will be provided in the coming days.

Changes to the Employment Standards Code will allow employees to take 14 days of paid, job-protected leave if they are:

- required to self-isolate
- sick or caring for a loved one with COVID-19

To be eligible, employees:

- will not be required to have a medical note
- do not need to have worked for an employer for 90 days

This leave covers the self-isolation period recommended by Alberta's chief medical officer. We recognize






this could put pressure on employers, and are working towards a solution to address these challenges.

Business continuity plans


Employers should consider their business continuity plans and how COVID-19 could impact their workplace. To prepare, make plans to:

- protect employees
- limit spread in workplaces
- ensure continuity of critical services if staff are ill or self-isolating
- explore alternate working arrangements, such as:
 - working from home or remotely
 - doing work that doesn't require contact with other people


Resources

- [OHS: Respiratory viruses and the workplace](#) 
- [Employment standards rules](#)
- [Business continuity planning](#)  (PDF, 319 KB)
- [WCB: COVID-19 worker fact sheet](#)  (PDF, 57 KB)
- [WCB: COVID-19 employer fact sheet](#)  (PDF, 70 KB)
- [POSTERS: Help Prevent the Spread](#) 

Info for municipalities


We are providing advice based on current evidence and [public health recommendations](#)  from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Helping local organizations plan for an outbreak

- [Business continuity planning](#) , is essential in preparing critical operations for potential interruptions.
- [Alberta Emergency Management Agency](#) field officers are available to support municipalities, First Nations and Metis Settlements with their emergency management and business continuity planning.

Supporting the health system

Communities should:

- refer anyone with health-related concerns to [Health Link 811](#)  and promote it as a reliable source of information
- promote the [Respiratory Viruses and the Workplace guide for workplaces](#)
- review business continuity plans to ensure disruptions from staff shortages have been considered,

especially for critical operations

- stay informed about the current situation in Alberta via this web page

Resources

- [OHS: Respiratory viruses and the workplace](#)
- [Business continuity planning](#) ↓
- [Help Prevent the Spread posters](#) ↗

Chief Medical Officer updates

Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw issued the following statement for Albertans on March 15:

“ As the Premier noted, I have recommended that aggressive new public health measures be implemented across the province.

"Here in Alberta, we have confirmed 17 new cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours.

"This means that 56 cases have now been identified in our province. Two of the individuals are receiving treatment in hospital and are in stable condition. The other 15 cases are self-isolating at home and expected to make a full recovery. As always, health officials have taken swift action to isolate these individuals and any close contacts who may be at risk.

"However, there are several concerning elements in these new cases.

"Our investigation has determined that seven of these cases stem from a single gathering that took place in Calgary Zone. This underlines the fact that gatherings can accelerate spread of the virus. In addition,

at least two of our new cases within the last two days appear to have been acquired from an unknown source. This means we are likely seeing community transmission in Alberta.

"Community transmission is when a person catches the virus from someone who stayed in the province, and not from someone who recently travelled.

"Until now, all cases in Alberta had been travel related.

"These two cases mean that there are other cases in the community that we have not identified, increasing the likelihood that Albertans may be exposed within their communities.

"In addition, another development over the past two days has been conversations that I have been invited to participate in with school leaders from across the province. I have heard clearly from them that the guidance provided by Health is proving extremely difficult to put into practice at the front lines, due to product shortages, challenges with staffing, and other operational issues.

"I have repeatedly said that we will monitor developments, assess the emerging evidence, and take action accordingly. Based on what we've seen over the last two days, it is clear that now is the time for additional action. We need to put in place more restrictions to help slow the virus and protect public health.

"That is why, effective immediately, the Emergency Management Cabinet Committee has approved my recommendation that students no longer attend classes in schools or post-secondary institutions until further notice.

"All regularly scheduled classes are cancelled, regardless of class size. We are also asking all licenced childcare facilities and out-of-school care programs to close immediately. Approved day homes are exempt due to the small number of children they care for, but are encouraged to use enhanced sanitation practices.

"As a parent with children in the school system, and afterschool care programs, I recognize that this is very disruptive for many families and for these sectors.

"This is not a decision that we are making lightly.

"I made this recommendation after extensive discussion with school boards and in consideration of the cases of community transmission identified over the weekend.

"To be clear, we are not closing schools. Teachers and other school staff should continue to come to their schools to plan potential alternatives for students, particularly those in grade 12.

"I know many parents, child care workers, and teachers will have questions. This decision was made only a few hours ago, so many details are being confirmed. We will provide answers and make sure that Albertans get the information they need.

"Also effective today, we are recommending new restrictions for all long-term care and other continuing care facilities. I am advising that these facilities limit visitation to essential visitors only at this time.

"Seniors and people with pre-existing health conditions are the most at risk from COVID-19. Special

precautions must be taken to ensure the virus is not spread to these groups.

"I know that families want to visit their loved ones. This step is not taken lightly, but is essential to protect the lives of the most vulnerable Albertans.

"I'm encouraging families and friends of those in these facilities to think of other ways besides visiting that they can support and encourage their loved ones through this difficult time.

"Finally, while last week I announced that places of worship were exempt from the restrictions on mass gatherings, this recommendation is changing.

"This exemption last week was done to try to minimize the impact of these restrictions on the daily lives of Albertans, and in the context of having only travel-related cases identified in the province. However, as I mentioned earlier, that has changed and we now have evidence that community transmission is occurring.

"Effective immediately, all places of worship are now being asked to follow the same restrictions being placed on other gatherings in the province.

"All mass gatherings of 250 people or more should be cancelled. Any event that has more than 50 attendees and expects to have international participants, or involves critical infrastructure staff, seniors, or other high-risk populations, should also be cancelled.

"Events that do not meet these criteria can proceed at this time, but risk mitigation must be in place, such as enforcing distancing of 1-to-2 metres between attendees, ensuring that ill attendees do not attend, and using sanitizer stations.

"Religious communities are a source of strength and comfort, especially in difficult times such as these. I encourage religious leaders to work with their faith communities to determine how they can continue to support each other, but in ways that reduce the risk of infection spreading.

"We all have a role to play in the days ahead.

"If you have loved ones or friends abroad, please connect with them to make them aware of the 14-day self-isolation period.

"I know this is a lot of information. These decisions are not made lightly, and I know they will have a tremendous impact on Albertans' day-to-day lives, particularly parents, children, and seniors.

"I know some Albertans may wonder if all these measures are truly necessary. I want to stress that they are necessary. It is crucial that we do everything possible to contain and limit the spread of COVID-19.

"The most effective way to do this is by taking a comprehensive, society-wide approach. Not testing alone. Not contact tracing alone. Not social distancing alone.

"All of them, together.

"The experience of China, South Korea, Singapore and others show that aggressive testing and contact tracing, combined with social distancing measures and community mobilization, can prevent infections and save lives

and save lives.

"That is why we are taking these actions, and why we will continue to closely monitor developments here at home and around the world.

"AHS is not currently cancelling elective surgeries or other procedures, but we are preparing for any future steps. If additional steps are needed in the coming days, AHS will take them.

"The health of Albertans is, and always will be, our top priority."

[Go back to COVID-19 info for Albertans](#)

Resources



- [Help Prevent the Spread posters](#) [↗]
- [Help Prevent the Spread Poster](#) [↗] (PDF, 933 KB)
- Government of Canada's 2019 New Coronavirus (2019-nCoV): Outbreak Notification - [English](#) [↗] | [Simplified Chinese](#) [↗] | [French](#) [↗]
- [AHS update on novel coronavirus](#) [↗]
- [Government of Canada's Travel Health Notices](#) [↗]
- [World Health Organization's Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) [↗]

News

- [Update on COVID-19 in Alberta](#) (March 15, 2020)
- [\\$500 million committed to COVID-19 response](#) (March 15, 2020)
- [Update on COVID-19 in Alberta](#) (March 14, 2020)
- [Update on COVID-19 in Alberta](#) (March 13, 2020)
- [Update on COVID-19 in Alberta](#) (March 12, 2020)

- [New cases of COVID-19 in Alberta](#) (March 11, 2020)
- [Seven new cases of COVID-19 confirmed](#) (March 10, 2020)
- [New cases of COVID-19 confirmed in Alberta](#) (March 9, 2020)
- [Two new presumptive COVID-19 cases in Alberta](#) (March 8, 2020)
- [Second presumptive COVID-19 case reported in Alberta](#) (March 6, 2020)
- [Presumptive COVID-19 case reported in Alberta](#) (March 5, 2020)

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