

## **The Basics of COVID-19**

### **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a new respiratory disease caused by a virus. The virus is part of the coronavirus family of viruses. The first presumptive case of COVID-19 in Ontario was identified on 25 January 2020.

### **COVID-19 is Spread by Respiratory Droplets**

Transmission of COVID-19 is person-to-person, by contact with respiratory droplets. When a person infected with COVID-19 produces respiratory droplets they may pass the virus when those droplets land on someone else's mouth, nose, or eyes (mucous membranes). Transmission is more likely when someone is producing more respiratory droplets, such as while coughing or sneezing.

Respiratory droplets may also land on surfaces, such as tables or counters. If a person touches a surface where the respiratory droplets have landed, and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth the virus may be passed. This is why it is important not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth unless you have just washed your hands, and why people caring for those who may have COVID-19 should use contact and droplet personal protective equipment (PPE) in addition to routine practices.

The virus can survive on a surface for hours to a few days, depending on the surface. However, only small amounts of the virus remain for the longer time period. This is why it is important to clean high-touch surfaces frequently, ideally at least twice per day in a home, and more often in other settings.

### **Communicability**

COVID-19 is communicable while a person is symptomatic, and the timeframe for asymptomatic transmission has not yet been precisely determined (this is why contacts are sought 24 hours prior to symptom onset in an ill person). This is one reason why it is advised to practice social distancing (also referred to as physical distancing) and to wash hands frequently to help prevent the spread of the virus.

### **Incubation**

The median incubation is about 5 days, with a range of 2 to 10 days, however it can be up to 14 days from the time of exposure to the development of symptoms. This is why those who return from travel outside Canada, or who have had exposure to a person with COVID-19, are asked to self-isolate (more precisely self-quarantine as they do not have symptoms but a possible exposure), for 14 days.

### **Symptoms of COVID-19**

Symptoms of COVID-19 are typically of respiratory illness. The most common symptoms include one or more of the following: fever, cough, difficulty breathing, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, sore throat, and runny nose. The first three being most common.

Most cases of COVID-19 (about 80%) are mild, and can be managed symptomatically at home. Those at higher risk of more severe disease and complications include older people and people with chronic disease such as high blood pressure or diabetes. Those who are immunocompromised/immunosuppressed may be at higher risk of catching COVID-19 and of more severe disease.

### **Diagnosis of COVID-19**

COVID-19 is diagnosed with a nose swab that is sent to a lab. Not everyone needs to be tested, and people can self-isolate (stay at home away from others) as soon as they feel unwell.

### **Treatment of COVID-19**

There are no specific treatments for COVID-19.

Treatment is supportive, and people at home are advised to drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious foods, rest, and sleep. People may treat their symptoms with a humidifier or a hot shower, and may use lozenges and fever-reducing medicine (like acetaminophen) on the advice of their health care provider.

### **COVID-19 Quick Facts**

Disease name	COVID-19
Causative agent	SARS-CoV-2
Type of agent	Virus
Transmission	Respiratory droplet
Incubation	Median: 5 days      Range: 2-10 days      Up to: 14 days
Communicability	Not yet precisely determined; higher risk while symptomatic
Diagnosis	NP swab
Treatment	Symptomatic and supportive
Prevention	Handwashing Respiratory etiquette Social (physical) distancing Self-isolation and self-quarantine Case and contact follow-up