

# COVID-19: TESTING AND REDUCING STIGMA



**COVID-19 is an illness caused by a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which infect animals and others that can infect humans. They are spread through:**

- ▶ respiratory droplets when you cough or sneeze
- ▶ direct contact with a person infected with COVID-19
- ▶ touching an object or surface with the virus on it

Coronaviruses are **not** known to spread through water or ventilation systems.

## YOU CAN HELP REDUCE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 AND PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR LOVED ONES AND YOUR COMMUNITY:

- ▶ follow the advice of your local **public health authority** or nursing station
- ▶ stay home and away from others if you are ill
- ▶ **wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- ▶ use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- ▶ cough and sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands
- ▶ avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
- ▶ avoid close contact with people who are sick
- ▶ practise **physical distancing** as much as possible
- ▶ wear a **non-medical mask or face covering** in crowds or when physical distancing is not possible
- ▶ clean and **disinfect** frequently touched objects and surfaces

**Symptoms** of COVID-19 are often similar to other illnesses. They can:

- ▶ take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus
- ▶ be mild or more serious
- ▶ vary from person to person

If you are experiencing symptoms, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, **you must:**

- ▶ stay home (**isolate**) to avoid spreading it to others
- ▶ avoid contact with others (especially older adults, or those with medical conditions)
- ▶ if you live with others, stay in a separate room or keep a 2-metre distance
- ▶ call ahead before you visit a health care professional or call your local **public health authority** or nursing station
- ▶ tell them your symptoms, discuss the possibility of being tested, and follow their instructions
- ▶ if you need immediate medical attention, call 911

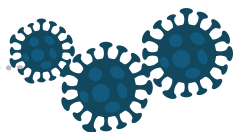
## TESTING

Testing for COVID-19 helps protect our elders and communities. It is the only way to confirm if someone currently has COVID-19, and it is an important tool to:

- ▶ stop the spread of the virus and prevent community outbreaks
- ▶ detect and isolate people who have COVID-19
- ▶ follow up with close contacts of someone confirmed to have COVID-19 (contact tracing)
- ▶ better understand the virus

Getting tested **will help** provide you with a positive or negative diagnosis of COVID-19. It will also assist with contact tracing, which is done confidentially by public health officials or other appropriately trained people to identify individuals you may have been in contact with while contagious.

Getting tested **will not** put your personal health information at risk. Your identity, health status and other personal information is only shared with health care providers as required.



# STIGMA

The COVID-19 pandemic can cause stress on people and communities. It can lead to individuals experiencing social stigma, exclusion, marginalization, mental health issues and discrimination. Lack of understanding about COVID-19 has sparked feelings of fear or anger towards others and unfair treatment against a number of groups, including:

- ▶ people who have COVID-19
- ▶ people who have symptoms of COVID-19
- ▶ health care, front-line and essential workers
- ▶ people from countries where the virus originated from
- ▶ people who have recently travelled or returned to Canada from another country
- ▶ people from communities, cultures, or industries where COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred
- ▶ people who may not follow recommended public health measures

Stigma and discrimination are known barriers that prevent people from getting tested or accessing the care, treatment and support they need. People who have experienced stigma and discrimination throughout their life (e.g., racialized groups, people with mental illness or disability, members of LGBTQ2IA+ communities) may not have access to protective resources during a pandemic, like a safe home to isolate or quarantine when ill, which may introduce additional challenges.

Stigma and discrimination can be dangerous and harmful to individuals and communities by:

- ▶ exposing people to high levels of guilt and stress
- ▶ disempowering people who cannot control their living, working, or social circumstances
- ▶ creating divisions within communities
- ▶ causing people to delay or avoid health services and contacting health authorities
- ▶ making it harder to monitor, stop or slow outbreaks
- ▶ discouraging people from being tested or quarantined
- ▶ making it harder to trace and notify people who may have come into contact with COVID-19 (contact tracing)

## We can all do our part to reduce stigma around COVID-19.

Even people without symptoms can test positive for COVID-19. This includes people who have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic) and may never develop symptoms (asymptomatic). That is why it is important to:

- ▶ show support, kindness and empathy to those who have, or are tested for, COVID-19
- ▶ **take care of your mental and physical health**
- ▶ **protect yourself and those around you**
- ▶ choose your words carefully

SAY...	INSTEAD OF...
COVID-19; Coronavirus	The virus from Asia/China/ Wuhan
People who may have COVID-19	Suspected cases of COVID-19
People who have COVID-19; People being treated for COVID-19	COVID-19 cases or victims

**Mental health and family violence support services are available to you**, such as the **Wellness Together Canada: Mental Health and Substance Use Support portal** and the **Stop Family Violence** webpages.

## LEARN AND SHARE THE FACTS

Share inspiring stories about those who have recovered from COVID-19, and about community heroes – health care workers, community service providers, grocery store employees, delivery people, long-term care home workers and first responders – who provide support to the population and care for those who are ill.

Get accurate information about COVID-19 from trustworthy sources, such as [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus), your **local or provincial/territorial public health authority, or a nursing station in a First Nation community**.

