

Revised December 8, 2020

## Staying Safe during COVID-19

### A Winter Guide for Seniors

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease. The main source of infection is from close contact with someone who has COVID-19. People are contagious before they show symptoms, and so keeping our distance is the most important step to protecting ourselves, our family and our friends.

In general, the risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age. Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear. Refer to [COVID-19 information for seniors](#) to learn how you can reduce your risk.

**Have questions? Call Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 (8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.).**

#### Safer everyday activities

Stay home as much as possible. Plan ahead and limit non-essential trips.

- Continue with online banking, purchases, and curbside pickup, when possible.
- Connect with family and friends virtually.
- Stock up on essential supplies such as cleaning products, toiletries or pet food.
- Reach out if you need help from others.
- Call 211 for support from community services.
- Download the [COVID Alert app](#) so you can be notified if you come in contact with someone who is contagious with COVID-19.

#### Wear a mask

Wear a mask when leaving your home, or in shared areas of residential buildings.

- Your mask should be made of at least two layers of woven fabric.
- A third filter layer can provide added protection.
- The best mask is the one that fits [comfortably](#), and is worn properly.
- Cloth masks can be reused with regular laundering.
- People at greater risk for severe illness should consider using a three-layer mask or a medical mask, if available.

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## Stay active

- Move around the house, do stretches, or watch or stream a fitness classes.
- When going out, watch the weather forecast and plan ahead.
- Some winter sports like skiing and ice skating may require you to book an appointment first.
- Dress in layers, with mittens and hats to keep your body warm.
- Wear winter boots with good grip to avoid slips and falls.

## COVID-19 symptoms and testing

If you have [symptoms](#) or have been told that you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19:

- Make an appointment to [get tested](#). Do not use public transit to go to your appointment.
- If you do not drive, ask a friend for a lift. Sit at the back, wear a mask and open windows.
- Do not go to a pharmacy for testing if you have symptoms.
- Stay home, self-isolate while you wait for your test results.
- Shop online or call a friend to pick up supplies for you.
- Call your health care provider if you need help managing your symptoms.

If you, or someone you know have chest pain, shortness of breath, weakness or dizziness please take them to the emergency room. If the person is not well enough to drive, call 911.

## Health care visits

Do not delay visits to your health care provider if you have health concerns. Continue with your prescribed medication and treatment plans. Do not make changes without talking with your health care provider.

- Ask if they offer telephone or online services.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19:
  - Call ahead before visiting.
  - Do not take public transit. Drive or call a friend.
  - Use a face mask or covering, and keep two metres/six feet from others.
  - Call the office when you arrive, and wait outside or in your car until you are called.
- Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 if you have health questions.
- Arrange to get a flu shot.

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## Staying connected virtually

- Limit visits to people you live with. If you live alone, visit with one other household.
- Pick up the phone and call a family member, neighbour or friend to keep in touch.
- Use video chats, emails, texting and other virtual platforms to stay connected.
- When trying new virtual tools and apps, don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Use video platforms to schedule group events such as movie nights, coffee chats, book clubs or religious services.
- Access free virtual and phone-based activities at [COVID-19: Stay, Play & Learn at Home](#). Search by 'Seniors' or 'Older Adults' to find many types of free virtual activities for seniors.

## Holiday Planning

- Shop early to avoid shipping delays or crowds.
- Decorate your home, dress up and do fun activities every day to keep the holiday spirit.
- Arrange for contactless delivery of treats and gifts for family and friends.
- Connect virtually with family and friends for celebrations, meals and opening gifts.
- Share family photos, recipes or an [e-card](#) to celebrate holidays and special occasions.
- Holidays can be stressful. Share your feelings with someone you trust or reach out for support.

## Keep with routines and healthy habits

- Open windows for sunlight and air flow.
- Stay active. Go out for fresh air and exercise.
- Eat a variety of vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Don't skip meals.
- Drink more water, and reduce sugar intake.
- Limit your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.
- When feeling overwhelmed, reach out for help (see resources below).

## Reaching out for assistance

- Call 2-1-1 or the [Toronto Seniors Helpline](#) at 416-217-2077
- For online resources: [211 Ontario for older adults](#), [Toronto Seniors Services](#), and [mental health resources](#).

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**Protect from frauds and scams**

Health Canada is currently reviewing COVID-19 vaccines that have been developed to ensure they are safe and effective. Once a vaccine is approved for use in Canada, it will be free through a health care provider. Do not purchase products or vaccines with claims to protect you against COVID-19. Do not give out personal information to unsolicited callers. Toronto Public Health staff will never ask for your credit card or social insurance number.