

A GUIDE TO COVID-19

CARING FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to provide useful information to help you care for yourself and others during the COVID-19 pandemic.



COVID-19: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which spreads between people, mainly when an infected person is in close contact with another person. COVID-19 is spread by the respiratory droplets an infected person produces when they breathe, cough, sneeze, talk or sing. If you are in contact with an infected person, the virus can enter your body if droplets get into your throat, nose or eyes. Unvaccinated people are at high risk of getting COVID-19 and face the most severe consequences of the disease. They can also transmit the virus amongst other unvaccinated people.

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and the common cold. Symptoms may vary from person to person. Some people may experience mild symptoms, while others can have severe illness.

Key symptoms of COVID-19 include fever or chills, cough, loss of smell or taste and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms may include loss of appetite, extreme fatigue or tiredness, head and body aches, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea. COVID-19 illness can be mild, but symptoms may suddenly worsen in a few days. Children have similar, but usually milder, symptoms as adults.

Elders, people with chronic health or respiratory conditions, pregnant people, and people with compromised immune systems due to disease or treatment have a high risk of getting serious complications if they become sick.

PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

How to Avoid and Limit the Spread of Infection

COVID-19 VACCINATION

Indigenous people are both at higher risk of getting COVID-19 and of having severe disease than non-Indigenous people in BC. Getting vaccinated is one of the most important actions for individuals and communities to take. All of the recommended doses are crucial to prevent severe illness (hospitalization or death) for individuals and to reduce spread in communities.

After the distribution of billions of vaccines worldwide, doctors agree that the vaccines are the best way to protect you against COVID-19. We know that they are safe and that they work. When you get immunized, you not only gain protection from the virus but also make it less likely you will pass it to others, including those who can't be vaccinated.

Some variants (mutations) of COVID-19, such as the Omicron variant, spread more easily and cause more severe illness than the original virus. The vaccines provide strong protection against variants.

Currently, COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in people aged five and older, however children aged five to 11 received smaller doses.

Vaccine clinics in BC are available both in community (on reserve), in immunization clinics run by the regional health authorities, and at some pharmacies.

For more information on where you can get vaccinated, [visit the provincial website](#) to make an appointment. For more information on the COVID-19 vaccines, visit our [vaccine webpage here](#).



In addition to continuing to follow public health measures and getting vaccinated, the following can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

FACEMASKS

Non-medical (cloth) facemasks are an important layer of protection used to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Facemasks are an effective preventive measure often mandated by current public health orders. Those who are most vulnerable, such as those who are unvaccinated, may choose to continue to wear face masks even after orders are lifted. Be sure to wash your facemask between uses.

Wearing a medical mask is required for patients, clients and visitors to health care facilities and hospitals. Medical masks are usually provided upon entry. N95 and KN95 masks are often used in clinical settings by doctors and nurses and are not usually recommended for the general public.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing is a means to limit close contact with other people to slow the spread of infectious disease. Keeping two metres (six feet) apart from others is an effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Most importantly, if you feel sick, stay home and isolate from others. Get tested for COVID-19 if you are exhibiting symptoms

HANDWASHING

An 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. If a sink is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60 per cent alcohol to clean your hands.



SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Plan for safer social interactions. When deciding to attend an in-person gathering, consider the risk factors for yourself and the people you are planning to be around. Keep a record of who you are with so that if there is an illness or “virus present” it will be easier to contain the spread. Check the current public health orders or guidance on gatherings from your regional health authority.

The rules surrounding social gatherings will depend on the current public health orders from the Provincial Health Officer, as well as any regional health restrictions, or rules enacted by First Nations bands or governments.

Proof of vaccination via the [BC Vaccine Card](#) is required to gain access to many non-essential businesses and events. People wishing to attend these places are required to be fully vaccinated and show their BC Vaccine Card.

The BC Vaccine Card also applies to visitation of long-term care homes and assisted living homes. All visitors to these facilities will need to be fully vaccinated.

Visit the BC Centre for Disease control website for more [information on social interactions](#).

TRAVEL

Travel within BC or to other provinces is permitted, however that may be subject to change based on current health orders within each province. Travelers are required to be fully vaccinated to travel from a Canadian airport, on VIA Rail and Rocky Mountaineer trains, or on non-essential passenger vessels (such as a cruise ship).

For the latest information on travel, visit the [Government of BC website](#) or if you’re travelling internationally, reference the [global travel advisories page](#) from the Government of Canada.

A Canadian COVID-19 [proof of vaccination](#) is required for travel outside of Canada.



SYMPTOMS AND TESTING

Testing can determine if you have COVID-19. This is an important step to help reduce the spread of the virus. There are two types of tests available: **PCR tests and rapid tests.**

PCR TESTS

PCR tests are conducted by trained health care providers who take a nasal swab. Results are generally analyzed in a lab and can take one to three days. These kinds of tests provide more accurate results than rapid tests because they use a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) to identify the viral genetic material of COVID-19.

RAPID TESTS

[Rapid tests \(called rapid antigen tests\)](#) also involve collecting a nasal swab. Rapid tests can be conducted at home and provide quick results – generally within 15 minutes.

When taken while someone is at the peak of their infection, rapid antigen tests generally provide accurate results as this is when virus levels in the body are the highest. That's why these tests are only being used in BC for individuals who have COVID-19 symptoms.

Some First Nations communities have access to another type of rapid test that can provide results of similar quality to lab-based tests. Consult your health centre to see if your community has this equipment in place.

WHEN DO I NEED A COVID-19 TEST?

Testing is a priority for Indigenous people in BC who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (see page 2 of this guide for examples). If you feel unsure about your symptoms:

- use the BC [Self-Assessment Tool](#) or
- contact your health care provider or community health nurse or call 8-1-1, or call the [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program](#) (1-855-344-3800)

If you find it difficult to breath, have chest pain, cannot drink anything, feel very sick, or feel confused, contact your health care provider right away or go to your local emergency department or call 9-1-1.

People older than 55 or who are at greater risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 should get tested by a health care practitioner if that option is available within 24 to 72 hours of the onset of symptoms. If that option is not available, use a rapid (at-home) test.

TEST RESULTS

If your test result is negative, it means the COVID-19 virus was not detected at the time the test was taken. This could be because there was not enough virus in your body for the swab to pick it up or that you do not have the virus. It is still possible that you have COVID-19. If you test negative but continue to have cold or flu-like symptoms, the FNHA recommends you test again in 24 to 48 hours.

Even if the test is negative, it is important to self-isolate until your symptoms improve and you feel well enough to return to regular activities. Symptoms might be from other respiratory illnesses that can also make others sick.

If you are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19, you still need to self-isolate for 10 days from the day you had contact with that person unless you are fully vaccinated or had COVID-19 within the last 90 days.

IF YOUR TEST IS POSITIVE

If your result is positive, it means COVID-19 was detected. You likely have COVID-19 and could spread it to others.

Self-isolate for at least five days from the first day you had symptoms if you are fully vaccinated (two doses). If you are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, self-isolate for 10 days.

Manage your symptoms, notify your close contacts of your illness, and [report positive test results](#) via a secure online form to the BC Centre for Disease Control.

For more information, visit the FNHA's [I Have COVID-19](#) web section.

COVID-19 TESTING AND STIGMA

It is essential that we all feel safe and confident getting tested for COVID-19, and that those who test positive still feel supported in their recovery and are not discriminated against.

Let's be kind to each other and thankful for all of the efforts and protective measures that individuals and communities are taking for the safety of us all. Read more about [kindness and COVID-19 here](#).



PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

IF YOU ARE PREGNANT

Pregnant women who contract COVID-19 are at greater risk of becoming severely unwell and are more likely to give birth prematurely. The best protection for you and the fetus is to get vaccinated (pregnant women are also eligible for a booster dose eight weeks after their second dose, rather than the standard six months). As well as protecting the mother, there is strong evidence that the vaccinated mother passes along the protective antibodies to the fetus through the placenta.

Any individual who develops an influenza illness, like COVID-19, while pregnant will need seek medical evaluation and enhanced fetal surveillance. A hospital birth and continuous monitoring in labour is recommended.

IF YOU ARE BREASTFEEDING

Women who are breastfeeding should continue to do so, even after testing positive for COVID-19. Breastfeeding protects your baby against many illnesses and helps strengthen their immune system.

It is important to stay healthy and strong to care for your baby and make breast milk. By getting vaccinated against COVID-19, you not only protect yourself but can also pass along antibodies to your baby through breast milk.

Reach out to people in your community with breastfeeding knowledge such as your community health nurse, birth doula, doctor, midwife or nurse practitioner.

You can call the [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#) at **1-855-344-3800** to speak to a doctor. There is also the [Maternity and Babies Advice Line](#) available 24 hours a day, seven days a week via Zoom video conferencing.



MANAGING SELF-ISOLATION AND SELF-MONITORING

When you are self-isolating it means staying at home and keeping away from others to help stop the spread of COVID-19. People may be asked to self-isolate for many different reasons, including:

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19
- If you are showing symptoms of COVID-19
- If you are a close contact of someone with COVID-19
- If you live in a household with another person who has COVID-19
- When you are travelling to BC from outside of Canada

If you test positive for COVID-19, you will need to self-isolate (for at least five days from the first day you had symptoms if you are fully vaccinated, or at least 10 days if you are not). Self-monitor your symptoms carefully and call 8-1-1 or your health care provider if you are having severe difficulty breathing (i.e., struggling to breathe or speaking in single words), experiencing severe chest pain, finding it very hard to wake up, feeling confused, or losing consciousness.

If you live with others, stay in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom if you can. If you are in the same room with anyone, avoid face-to-face contact and wear a facemask. Friends and family can drop off food outside your room or home.

[Refer to this advice](#) from the BC Centre for Disease Control on self-monitoring and self-isolating.

Health Benefits related to [transportation and accommodation](#) are available to support self-isolation. Details are in the FNHA Health Benefits Available section on page 12.



HOUSEKEEPING AND CLEANING WITH A SICK FAMILY MEMBER

If somebody is sick, keep their personal items (such as toothbrush, cups, and cell phones) separate from everyone else's. Put all used paper towels, masks and tissues into trash bins lined with a plastic bag and empty the garbage frequently. Be sure to wash your hands afterwards. Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding or other items with those who are sick.

Utensils, pots and pans, and other dishwasher-safe food preparation items can be cleaned and sanitized in the dishwasher with a hot rinse cycle or washed with hot soapy water.

Place laundry in a laundry basket with a plastic liner. Wash with regular laundry detergent and hot water and dry it on a high temperature setting until no longer damp.

Clean hard surfaces such as taps, counters, doorknobs, light switches, telephones and railings with a disinfectant or bleach solution (bleach should be mixed with two tablespoons per one quart of regular water). Note that cleaning physically removes, rather than kills, viruses and bacteria. First clean with water, detergent, and steady friction from a washcloth or rag. Then disinfect after cleaning to kill viruses and bacteria. Use disinfectant solution only on objects, never on the human body.

ITEMS TO HAVE ON HAND

- Non-perishable food items, such as canned or frozen soups, juices, fruits and vegetables, canned fish, crackers, and peanut butter
- Household cleaning supplies, such as bleach or disinfectant, dishwashing soap and paper towels
- Personal hygiene products such as soap, hand sanitizer, shampoo and toilet paper
- A fever thermometer and over-the-counter fever medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil)
- Prescription medications



LOOKING AFTER LOVED ONES

- Providing supportive care to loved ones who are sick at home includes helping them to rest, drink plenty of fluids, and use a pain reliever for fever and body aches
- If you are providing direct care to someone who is sick, avoid visiting other people
- If possible, have only one person care for those who are sick to limit the number of people exposed
- If you can, find a person who can be your “buddy” so that if you get sick, your buddy can go to the pharmacy or store for you – and you can be someone else’s buddy too
- You can use technology such as phone and video calls to keep in touch with friends, family members and others in your community or neighbourhood
- You can offer to get groceries and run errands for people who are sick or are at higher risk of getting serious complications if they become sick
- Keep emergency phone numbers in a place where everyone in the household can find them

MEDICATION

Anti-fever medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) can help ease the symptoms of COVID-19. If you need medication, use a pharmacy delivery service or ask a friend or family member that is not in your bubble to pick up your medication and bring it to your home. Call your pharmacy ahead of time to ask about options. Temporary coverage for over-the-counter drugs for pain and fever are available through Health Benefits, as is mileage for medication pickup. Details are in the FNHA Health Benefits Available section on page 11 .

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE

If your symptoms are mild and you live in a rural or remote area, it is possible to move closer to an equipped medical facility so that you can more easily access health care if you need to. If your symptoms are severe, such as shortness of breath, chest pain or if a fever continues more than three days despite taking anti-fever medication, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest Emergency Department. Call ahead before you get medical care. By calling ahead, you help the clinic, hospital, lab or doctor’s office prepare for your visit and stop the spread of germs.



MEDICAL SUPPORT

FIRST NATIONS VIRTUAL DOCTOR OF THE DAY

You may not have easy access to a primary care health provider due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program enables BC First Nations individuals to make virtual appointments with a doctor. The program supports First Nations people and their family members who live on-reserve or away-from-home (off-reserve) and who have limited or no access to their family doctor. The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program includes doctors of Indigenous ancestry and all doctors follow the principles and practices of cultural safety and humility.

If you do not have a doctor of your own or if you have lost access to your doctor due to the COVID-19 pandemic, call **1-855-344-3800** to book an appointment. Medical office assistants are available to help you seven days per week from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

FIRST NATIONS VIRTUAL SUBSTANCE USE AND PSYCHIATRY SERVICE

This service provides individuals with access to specialists in addictions medicine and psychiatry. It is a referral-based service and is available at no cost to all BC First Nations people and their family members, even if those family members are not Indigenous. Specialists are dedicated to the principles and practices of cultural safety and humility, and to delivering trauma-informed care. [Learn more here.](#)



FNHA HEALTH BENEFITS AVAILABLE

Medical Transportation Benefits to Support Self-isolation

If you are required to self-isolate or have tested positive for COVID-19, Medical Transportation benefits may be available to assist you. You may be eligible for isolation support if you meet one or more of the following conditions:

- Are confirmed as having COVID-19 or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and been advised to self-isolate by a health professional.
- Have a positive COVID-19 test and live more than 2 hours from a hospital.

The FNHA Health Benefits program will provide Medical Transportation Benefits to the following groups:

- Elders (60+);
- People with pre-existing chronic conditions (such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, asthma, renal disease, heart disease);
- People with compromised immune systems due to disease or treatment (i.e., treatment of cancer or organ transplantation, with the associated increased range of chronic illnesses and inflammatory conditions);
- Children under 5 years of age and infants; and
- Pregnant women



If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and were told to recover at home, your household members may be eligible to access Medical Transportation benefits to stay elsewhere.

The FNHA Health Benefits Isolation Support team can help you with accommodation, travel and meals if you are required to self-isolate. To find out if you are eligible or if you have any self-isolation transportation questions, please call **1-888-305-1505** between 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 12-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.



ABORIGINAL PATIENT NAVIGATORS

Aboriginal Patient Navigators (APNs) connect with Aboriginal patients and family members, health care professionals, and other service providers in your region to ensure Aboriginal patients receive culturally safe, appropriate and timely care, whether in hospital or in community. Note that APNs are also referred to as Aboriginal Patient Liaisons or Aboriginal Liaison Nurses, depending on the region in which you live.

FRASER SALISH REGION:

- If you live in Surrey, Delta, White Rock, Langley and Tsawwassen, call the Aboriginal Mental Health Liaison at **604-953-4900** ext. 763041
- If you live in Mission, call the Aboriginal Mental Health Case Manager at **604-814-5642**
- More information: <https://www.fraserhealth.ca/Service-Directory/Services/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health---community-services/aboriginal-mental-health-liaisons>

INTERIOR REGION:

- This webpage provides a detailed list of APNs and contact information based on where you live in the Interior: https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/AboriginalHealth/Partnerships/Documents/APN_Contact.pdf
- Main telephone number: **250-469-7070**

NORTHERN REGION:

- This webpage provides a detailed list of Aboriginal Patient Liaisons and contact information based on where you live in the North: <https://www.indigenoushealthnh.ca/initiatives/APLs>
- Main telephone number: **250-649-7226**

VANCOUVER ISLAND REGION:

- This webpage provides a detailed list of Aboriginal Liaison Nurses and contact information based on where you live on Vancouver Island: <https://www.islandhealth.ca/our-services/aboriginal-health-services/aboriginal-liaison-nurses>
- Main telephone number: **1-877-370-8699** (toll-free)

VANCOUVER COASTAL REGION:

- Call **1-877-875-1131** (toll-free)
- More information: http://www.vch.ca/Locations-Services/result?res_id=771

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Feeling worried during a crisis is quite normal. You may have feelings of distress due to the uncertainty we are experiencing. You might even find that the COVID-19 pandemic triggers symptoms of trauma. Living through a pandemic can affect mental health and wellness. By being aware of these negative impacts on our wellness, we are better able to cope with them.

By staying connected to each other, supporting each other, and helping each other to maintain and build our resilience, we will get through this pandemic. Please reach out and connect with family members, friends, and health providers when you need to. Try and check in with your family members regularly to see how they are doing.

Health Benefits administers coverage for mental health counselling through three programs:

1. Mental Wellness and Counselling;
2. The Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program; and
3. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Health Support Services.

Counselling appointments are available for in-person or virtual sessions conducted by phone or video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Skype or FaceTime).

Contact your mental health provider to see if you can schedule a counselling appointment. When you talk to your provider, you should discuss what option you prefer and also explain what you feel the most comfortable with.

As long as you are seeing a [mental health provider who is registered with Health Benefits](#), all sessions are fully covered.

To learn more about these benefits or to find a registered mental health provider, call: **1-855-550-5454** or visit <https://www.fnha.ca/benefits/mental-health>

For a full list of mental health and cultural supports provided by the FNHA as well as partner agencies, you can refer to this document:

<https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-COVID-19-Mental-Health-and-Cultural-Supports.pdf>

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- [First Nations Health Authority](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [First Nations Public Service Secretariat](#)

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR SELF-ISOLATION SUPPORT?

To find out about self-isolation supports that you may be eligible for, call **1-888-305-1505** between 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, or noon to 4 p.m. on weekends, and the FNHA Health Benefits Isolation Support team can help you.

ASK YOUR LOCAL FNHA COMMUNITY RELATIONS REPRESENTATIVE

Community relations representatives have a deep knowledge of FNHA's Health Benefits program. If you have any questions related to Health Benefits, call the community relations representative in your region:

- **Fraser Salish region:** Sandra Martins-Toner
Tel: 604-802-6941 or Email: sandra.martins-toner@fnha.ca
- **Interior region:** Joyce Kenoras
Tel: 250-318-6634 or Email: joyce.kenoras@fnha.ca
- **Northern region:** Brandon Vickers
Tel: 250-960-8029 or Email: brandon.vickers@fnha.ca
- **Vancouver Coastal region:** Jenn Smith
Tel: 604-785-6955 or Email: jennifer.smith@fnha.ca
- **Vancouver Island region:** Darrell Thorne
Tel: 778-689-0720 or Email: darrell.thorne@fnha.ca