

# COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) FAQ for IWC staff

## About COVID-19

### Q. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus which has now spread to 162 countries (as of March 16, 2019) and has been classified as a global pandemic.

COVID-19 is a new disease that has not been previously identified in humans. It is highly contagious and it is important to take all the necessary steps to reduce its spread in Canada.

### Q. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms of COVID-19 have included:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- pneumonia in both lungs

However, those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms. You may not know you have symptoms of COVID-19 because they are similar to a cold or flu.

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. This is the longest known infectious period for this disease.

Source: [Government of Canada](#)

### Q. How is COVID-19 spread?

Human coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person through:

- respiratory droplets generated when you cough or sneeze
- close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

Current evidence suggests person-to-person spread is efficient when there is close contact.

### Q. What can I do to avoid getting and/or spreading COVID-19

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Stay home if you are sick
- When coughing or sneezing: Cover your mouth and nose with your arm or tissues to reduce the spread of germs o Immediately dispose of any tissues you have used into the garbage as soon as possible and wash your hands afterwards
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid visiting people in the hospitals or long-term care centres if you are sick
- Avoid groups and practice social distancing

## Q. What should I do if I have COVID-19 symptoms?

If you are ill and must visit a doctor, call ahead to tell them that you have a respiratory illness and/or COVID-19 symptoms (difficulty breathing). You may be asked to wear a mask while waiting for or receiving treatment to prevent the spread of the illness.

If you have travelled abroad and you develop fever, cough or difficulty breathing in the next 14 days:

- **isolate yourself within the home** as quickly as possible **and**
- call your health care provider or [public health authority](#)

Tell them your symptoms. Let them know whether you have had direct contact with animals or a sick person, especially if they have had symptoms, or if you have travelled recently.

## In Hamilton

Hamilton has two COVID-19 Assessment Centres. Before going to an Assessment Centre, you must do the following:

1. Complete a self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus) to determine if it is necessary to contact public health, your doctor or Telehealth Ontario for more guidance.
2. If the self-assessment indicates that clinical assessment is necessary, for further guidance contact:
  - Your doctor
  - Hamilton Public Health Services COVID-19 Hotline at 905-974-9848
  - Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000
3. If a referral is provided by your doctor, public health or Telehealth, you will be booked to visit an Assessment Centre.

Not everyone who comes to the Assessment Centres will be tested for COVID-19.

If you require urgent care, visit an Emergency Department or call 911, and inform them of your travel and contact history and symptoms.

## Q. How can I be prepared for COVID-19, self-isolation and social distancing?

If you have COVID-19 symptoms you will need to self-isolate. In order to be prepared you can:

- Fill your prescriptions in advance so you don't need to go to the pharmacy when you are ill.
- Stock up on essentials, but avoid panic buying. Canada has a good supply chain and there are no shortages anticipated. Things you may need to have on are: non-perishable foods (pasta, rice, canned soups and vegetables), pet food, facial and toilet tissue, feminine hygiene products and diapers for babies and toddlers.

The reason for stocking up on these items is not necessarily because you will need to self-isolate. Having these supplies on hand will ensure you do not need to leave your home at the peak of the outbreak or if you become ill.

## IWC Services

### Q. Is IWC still open?

IWC's offices are not open, but we are delivering services by phone. Please call your Settlement or Employment counsellor during regular business hours to receive service or book an appointment for service. If you phone your counselor and receive and do not connect with them, leave a message and they will respond to you phone call as soon as possible.

(Refer to IWC's phone directory to pass staff numbers and extensions to clients)

IWC will be modifying LINC classes to deliver some online Language Training activities during the public school closures (and to promote social distancing). More information on modified service will be available before Monday March 23, 2020.

## State of Emergency

### Q. Ontario has declared a State of Emergency, what does this mean?

A **state of emergency** is a situation in which the government is allowed to perform actions or impose policies that would not normally be allowed. A state of emergency has been declared in Ontario related to the COVID-19 spread and its prevention. The Government of Ontario is enacting the state of emergency to [“use every power possible to continue to protect the health and safety of all individuals and families.”](#)

This means the government of Ontario is empowered to make rules that it would not normally be allowed to make. As of March 17, 2020, these rules include:

- Closure of the following establishments:
  - All indoor recreation facilities (recreation centre's, gyms, etc...)
  - All public libraries
  - All private schools (public schools are already closed)
  - All licensed child care centres
  - All bars and restaurants, except to the extent that such facilities provide takeout food and delivery
  - All theatres, including live performances concert venues and movie cinemas
- Cancellation/ prohibition of all organized public events of over 50 people, including religious services in places of worship

More information on the declared state of emergency in Ontario can be found on the [Government of Ontario's website](#) and in the Government of Ontario's [news release](#) including [information in languages other than English](#).

### NOTE:

The Government of Ontario's new rules regarding public gatherings deal with the legal requirements as of today, March 17, 2020. Please see the recommendations for **Social Distancing** (below) for important recommendations to slow and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

**The current messaging from federal government is to “stay home” and reduce contact as much as possible.**

## Social distancing

### Q. What is social distancing?

- Social distancing is the practice of purposefully reducing close contact between people. According to the CDC, social distancing means:
- Remaining out of “congregate settings” as much as possible.
- Avoiding mass gatherings.
- Maintaining distance of about 6 feet/ 2 meters from others when possible.

### Q. Why is social distancing important?

Social distancing is necessary to prevent the spread of contagious illnesses such as COVID-19 (coronavirus). COVID-19 can spread through coughing, sneezing and close contact. By minimizing the amount of close contact we have with others, we reduce our chances of catching the virus and spreading it to our loved ones and within our community.

### Q. When should I start social distancing?

You should start social distancing now. It is important to start social distancing COVID-19 spreads further in the community.

### Q. Who is social distancing important for?

Social distancing is important for all of us, but those of us who are at higher risk of serious complications caused by COVID-19 should be especially cautious about social distancing. People who are at high risk of complications include older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes and lung disease.

### Q. What do we mean by “flatten the curve”?

“Flattening the curve” means reducing the number of people who are sick at one time. If there are many COVID-19 cases all at once, our health care system could become overwhelmed. Everything we can do to help stop COVID-19 from spreading rapidly – like social distancing – will help keep the number of people who are sick at one time as low as possible so that our health care system can provide care to those who need it.

## In the community

### Q. What is happening with the schools?

All publicly funded schools in Ontario have closed for an additional two (2) weeks after March Break in order to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. This means that schools will not reopen until April 6, 2020 at the earliest.

### Q. What else is closed?

The City of Hamilton has closed libraries and recreation centres. More information is available on the [City of Hamilton](#) website.