What You Need to Know About COVID-19

What is COVID-19?
- COVID-19 is a new strain of the coronavirus—a virus that is responsible for 15 to 30% of common colds, but it can also cause serious respiratory infections.
- COVID-19 stands for COrona VIrus Disease and 2019 is the year it was discovered.
- Scientists around the globe are working hard to learn how the virus spreads and how to treat it. There are several vaccines that will soon be available in Canada to prevent COVID-19.
- For the current status of cases in our community, see the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health COVID-19 Dashboard.

What are the symptoms?
- Respiratory infection symptoms range from mild (80%) to moderate / severe (20%) and include fever, cough, breathing difficulties, sore throat, runny nose, loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty swallowing, and muscle pain.
- Symptoms can take up to 14 days to appear after being exposed to the virus.
- Fever may be absent in the elderly, the very young, immunosuppressed, or those taking fever-lowering medications.
- Older adults and children may also have general symptoms like chills, headaches, sleeping more than usual, feeling disoriented, confusion, muscle aches, dizziness, weakness, or falls.
- Some children can get a very rare condition that causes inflammation. Seek medical attention right away if a child is not improving or gets a rash, long lasting fever, red eyes and/or swelling in their hands and feet.
- Some people may have mild or no symptoms. People who have COVID-19, but do not have symptoms, can still spread the virus. People with weakened immune systems, existing health conditions, or who are over the age of 60 are at higher risk for serious illness.

How does COVID-19 spread?
- The virus spreads from an infected person to others through respiratory droplets. These droplets occur when someone coughs, sneezes, talks or breathes. Dr Peter Lin describes it as a "cloud" of virus in front of the infected person, like a cloud of smoke (CBC Dec 3, 2020).
- Droplets can travel more than 2 metres / 6 feet when a person sings, laughs or talks loudly. Being in confined spaces, crowded areas and places with poor ventilation may increase the risk of catching it.
- It is not known exactly how long the virus can live on objects, so it is unknown how easily the infection is spread by contact. It may be possible to catch it by touching surfaces that have the virus on them and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. Washing your hands frequently and not touching your face can help to protect you from this risk.

How do we stay safe?
- Wear a mask, preferably 3 layers, with a type of filter in the middle. See Health Canada
- Keep two metres/six feet distance from others who are not in your household.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol).
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and objects.
- Limit non-essential trips outside your home and do not gather in large groups.

- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Avoid close contact with other people who are sick.
- Download the COVID Alert app so you can be notified directly if you have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.

Are masks required in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties?
- Non-medical masks / face coverings are required in enclosed indoor public spaces throughout Hastings and Prince Edward County unless an individual is under 2 years of age or has an exemption. See Questions and Answers on our website for details.
- Even when wearing a mask, it is important to wash your hands often, stay two metres/six feet from others, and stay home if you are sick.
- For more information about how to wear a mask properly, check out HPEPH infographics about How to Wear a Mask Safely or visit Ontario.ca. Health Canada has provided instructions on how to make cloth masks and 3-layer masks offer the best protection.

When and how do I get tested for COVID-19?
- Stay home and get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild, and self-isolate while you wait for your results.
- You can use the ministry Self-Assessment Tool to see if you should be tested if you have COVID-19 symptoms, have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, or are concerned you may have been exposed to the virus.
- Call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, your health care provider, or an assessment centre, if you have questions. You need to have an appointment to be tested.
- Test results are available online. If your test is negative, you can stop self-isolating 24 hours after your symptoms have gone away unless you have had contact with someone who has COVID-19. More information on self-isolation is below.

When should I self-isolate?
- Stay home and self-isolate according to advice from Public Health if you have:
  - tested positive for COVID-19
  - been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 (even if your test result is negative)
  - returned from travel outside of Canada, including the United States, in the past 14 days
  - been directed by public health to do so

Is there a treatment for COVID-19?
- There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 unless you are very sick and in the hospital. Call your health care provider if you need help to relieve the symptoms.
- Call 911 if you or someone else is having difficulty breathing.
- Health Canada is in the process of approving vaccines for COVID-19.

Beware of fraud and scams
- *Phishing* is when someone lies over the phone or by email to convince you into giving them your personal information. Hastings Prince Edward Public Health staff will never ask for your credit card or social insurance number.

Other questions? Talk to your health care provider or call our COVID Information Line at
- 613-966-5500 | Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY: Dial 711 | Website

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