

Pandemic Preparedness Guide



A FOREWORD FROM THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH OFFICER



Unlike short-term hazards such as earthquakes or floods, a pandemic event can last for several months and can impact the entire province. As a result, preparing for a protracted event is slightly different than preparing for short-term events. In addition to general

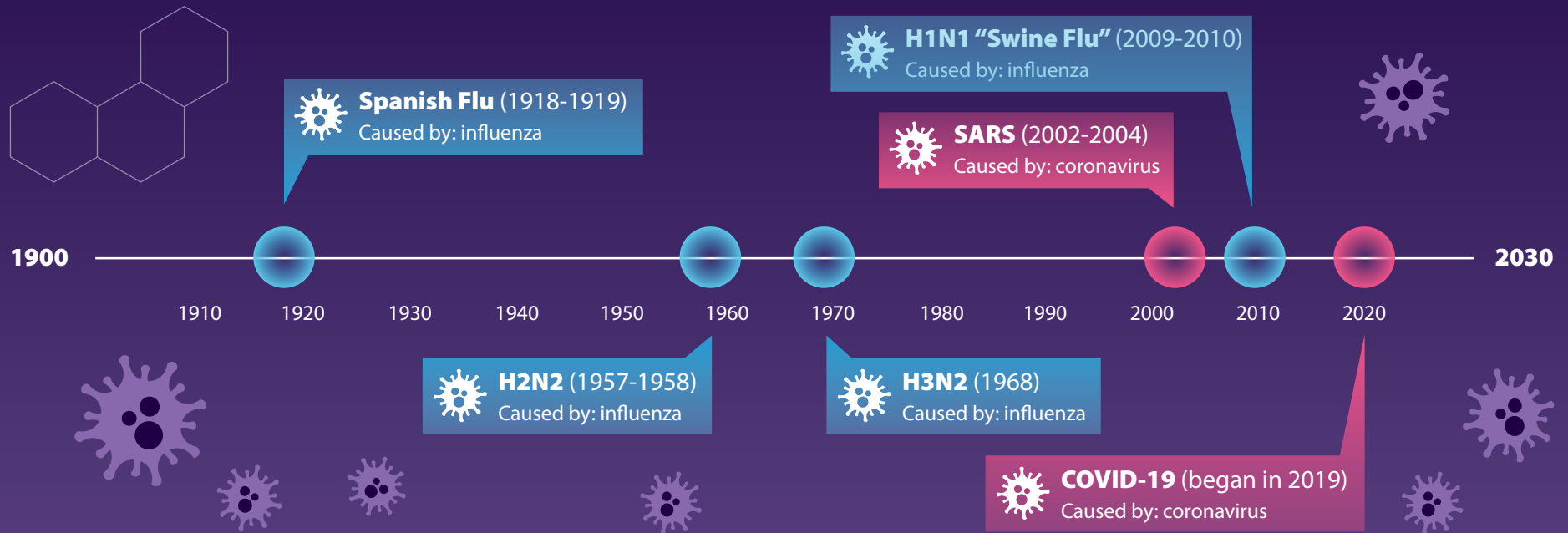
preparedness activities before a pandemic occurs, it is just as important to stay informed on the latest information to remain vigilant and to stay safe. This **Pandemic Preparedness Guide** is a roadmap to help you plan for a pandemic and provides resources, supports, and information on what to do to keep yourself and others safe.

As we've seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in BC and throughout the world, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear can quickly rise, especially when we are concerned about our loved ones and others who are vulnerable to serious complications. Being calm when faced with unique and unknown situations is a practice that not only supports our own mental health, it helps to care for and be kind to others.

Simple measures save lives. Along with washing your hands, staying home when sick, and keeping the number of people you interact with small, preparing for and staying up to date during a pandemic are measures to help British Columbians throughout the province to be calm, be kind, and be safe.

Dr. Bonnie Henry,
Provincial Health Officer





What is a Pandemic?

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease. Pandemics have occurred every 10 to 40 years dating back to the 1600s, and likely long before then.

There were four pandemics caused by influenza during the last century. From 1918-1919, the Spanish flu killed more than 20 million people worldwide. The most recent influenza pandemic, the swine flu, occurred from 2009-2010.

Coronaviruses have also caused global pandemics. Recent coronavirus pandemics include SARS (2002-2004) and COVID-19 (which began in 2019).

In our interconnected world, it may be a very short time between the emergence of a new pathogen and global spread. It's important to start preparing as soon as you can so you're ready for when and if a pandemic begins. This guide takes lessons we've learned from COVID-19, and other past pandemics, and explains how to prepare for future pandemics and remain prepared during the changing circumstances of a pandemic.

What is an epidemic?

An epidemic is the spread of a new disease across a region. One of the worst epidemics in BC history was the 1862 smallpox outbreak, which had a catastrophic effect on Indigenous communities. It resulted in a near-population collapse and dramatically impacted intergenerational traditional life and practices.

Before a Pandemic

There are many things we can do in advance to prepare for a pandemic. These tips work best if they are done before one begins, but are also worth doing while a pandemic is underway.

CONTACT AND MEDICAL INFO

Know and save copies of your household's contact and medical info. If you or someone you live with gets sick, having quick access to this info will help ensure proper care is received (see **page 19** for more).

Household health information:

Full name	Contact info	Health number	Medical requirements
.....
.....
.....
.....

Healthcare provider(s):

Name	Contact info	Address
.....
.....

HAVE A PLAN

Having an emergency plan is one of the best steps you can take to prepare for any emergency, including a pandemic. It can be as easy as starting a conversation at home. The following section will walk you through topics to consider as part of your basic emergency plan. As you discuss them, use the spaces provided to write notes. You can also find and download our fill-in-the-blanks emergency plan at:

preparedbc.ca/emergencyplan

TIP: Stay up to date on routine healthcare like dental cleanings, immunizations and eye exams. Some of these routine appointments may not be easy to access at certain stages of a pandemic.

BUILD AN EMERGENCY KIT

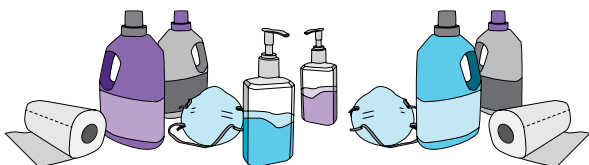
The same emergency kit you have for earthquakes or other emergencies can be useful for pandemics too. For most emergencies, you should gather enough supplies to stay at home for at least 3 to 7 days.

During a pandemic, you may need to stay home longer if you need to self-isolate. Adding additional food to your kit can help make that possible on short notice. Also consider pandemic specific items, like extra hand sanitizer and face masks (see **page 23** for more on what kind of face mask to choose).



Basic survival

- ☐ **Water** (4 litres per person, per day for drinking and sanitation)
- ☐ **Non-perishable food** (3-7 day supply) ☐ **Manual can opener**



Sanitation & pandemic preparedness

- ☐ Surface/household cleaners
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Laundry detergent
- ☐ Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- ☐ Disinfectants
- ☐ Tissues
- ☐ Soap
- ☐ Face masks (see **page 23**)
- ☐ **Additional food** (so you can manage comfortably at home if you're unable to go out - see **page 18** for more)



Health & medicine

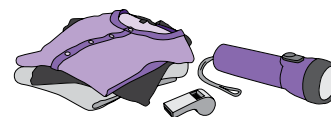
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Personal medications
- ☐ Spare glasses/contact lenses
- ☐ Toothpaste, toothbrush and other toiletries
- ☐ Thermometer



Peace of mind

- ☐ Pen and notepad
- ☐ Cash in small bills
- ☐ Copy of vital documents such as insurance papers
- ☐ Copy of your emergency plan

TIP: If you rely on a prescription, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how to keep a sufficient supply in your emergency kit. Be sure to check any supply in your emergency kit regularly and replace it before it expires.



Warmth & safety

- ☐ Emergency blanket
- ☐ Seasonal clothing
- ☐ Flashlight (battery-powered or hand-crank)
- ☐ Whistle



Communication

- ☐ Phone charger
- ☐ Battery bank
- ☐ Handheld radio (battery-powered or hand-crank)
- ☐ Extra batteries

TIP: For more information on how to build an emergency kit, visit preparedbc.ca/emergencykit

PRACTICE GOOD HAND HYGIENE

Handwashing is a simple and effective way to help prevent the spread of many illnesses. Experts recommend the following steps for handwashing:



TIP: The best way to clean your hands is with soap and water. However, if your hands are not visibly dirty, a hand sanitizer or alcohol-based hand wipe that contains at least 60% ethyl alcohol or isopropanol can also help reduce the number of germs.

You should always wash your hands after:

- touching parts of your body that are not clean
- using the bathroom
- coughing, sneezing or using a handkerchief or disposable tissue
- handling or preparing foods, especially after touching raw meat, poultry, fish, shellfish or eggs
- touching an animal, animal waste, pet food or pet treats
- touching high-contact surfaces, like door handles and PIN pads, in public places
- changing diapers, handling garbage, using the phone or shaking hands

PRACTICE GOOD SNEEZE ETIQUETTE

Diseases can spread when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. Even if you don't think you're sick, it's still important to practice cough etiquette.

Cough into your elbow or cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you sneeze. Immediately dispose of all used tissues in an appropriate waste bin and wash your hands right away.

TIP: Wearing a mask can also help prevent droplets from spreading from your nose and mouth. (See **page 23** for more on when to use a mask.)

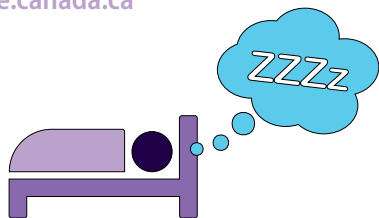
TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

One of the best defenses against a disease is a healthy immune system and good physical health. Maintain your physical health through a healthy diet, rest and physical activity:



Diet

- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods. Choose protein foods that come from plants more often.
- Limit highly processed foods and foods with a lot of added sodium, sugars or saturated fat.
- For more info, follow Health Canada's Food Guide: food-guide.canada.ca



Sleep

- Most adults do best when they get 7 to 8 hours of sleep each day.
- A lack of proper sleep can weaken your immune system and in severe cases lead to health complications.



Physical activity

- Adults (18-64 years) should aim to be active at least 2.5 hours a week and focus on moderate to vigorous aerobic activity, like running and bike riding.
- Youth (5-17 years) should get one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.
- For more information, see Health Canada's recommendations: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/physical-activity-your-health.html

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

It's a good idea to save or write down a list of people you can call for help during an emergency.

Ideally, at least one contact should be in your community so they can help if you become sick (see **page 19** for more). It's also helpful to have a contact that lives outside your area, in case your community is impacted by other hazards like wildfires, floods or tsunamis.

Contacts that live near me:

Full name	Contact info
.....
.....
.....
.....

Contacts that live outside my area:

Full name	Contact info
.....
.....
.....

When a Pandemic is Developing



We have strong global surveillance systems that can detect when a new virus has appeared that could cause a pandemic. If a pandemic is developing, the World Health Organization (WHO) provides information and advice on how to respond. Public info will also come from federal, provincial and regional health authorities.

KNOW WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

It's important to stay informed when a pandemic is expected. You can do this by paying attention to the trusted sources below:

World Health Organization (WHO)

 www.who.int
 [@WHO](https://twitter.com/WHO)
 facebook.com/WHO

Public Health Agency of Canada

 canada.ca/en/public-health
 [@GovCanHealth](https://twitter.com/GovCanHealth)
 facebook.com/HealthyCdns
 [@CPHO_Canada](https://twitter.com/CPHO_Canada)

First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)

 fnha.ca
 [@FNHA](https://twitter.com/FNHA)
 facebook.com/firstnationshealthauthority

BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)

 bccdc.ca
 [@CDCoBC](https://twitter.com/CDCoBC)

KNOW WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION (CONTINUED)

HealthLinkBC



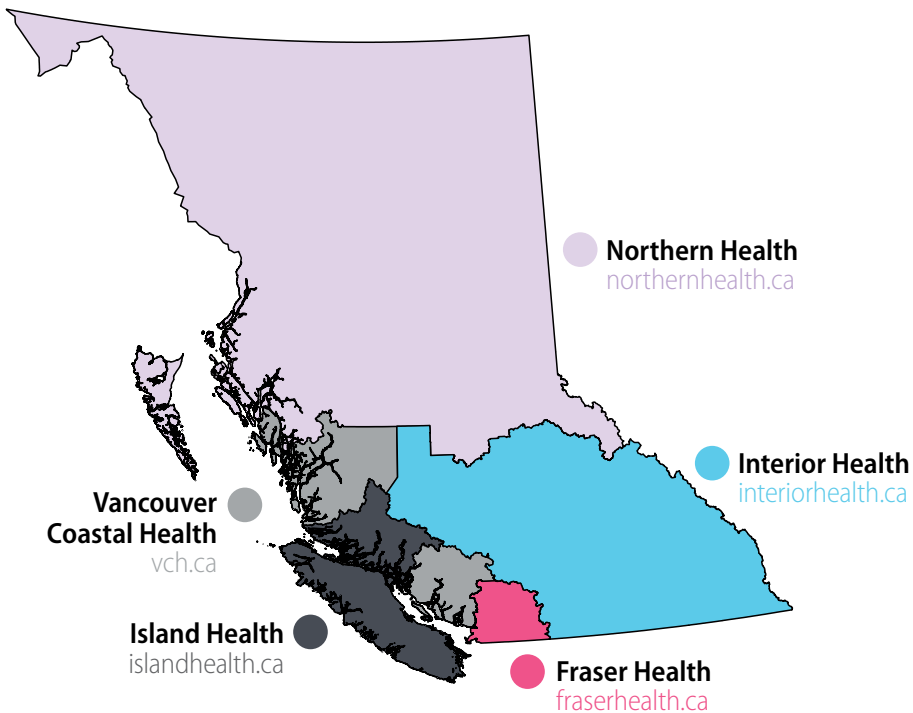
www.healthlinkbc.ca



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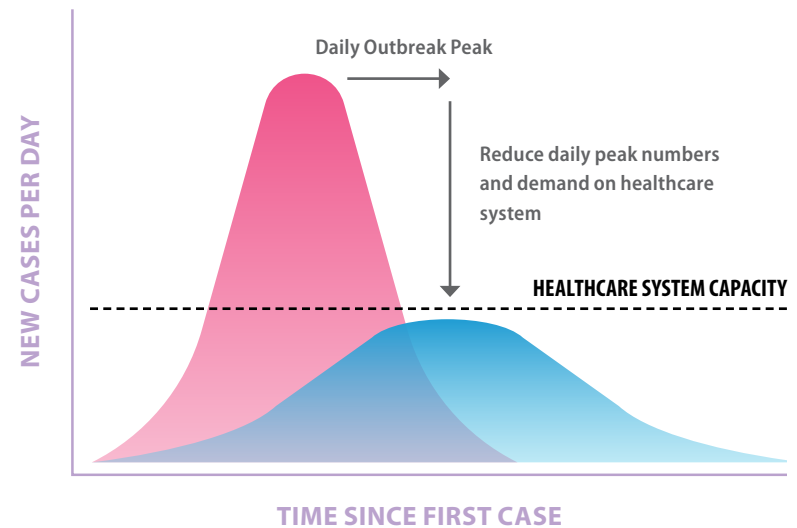
Regional Health Authorities

There are 5 regional health authorities in BC. They govern, plan and deliver health-care services for their geographic areas. Your local regional health authority is another great source for information:



"FLATTEN THE CURVE"

During COVID-19, and other past pandemics, one effective way of bringing them under control has been to “flatten the curve.” This means spreading out the number of new infections over a longer period of time so that our health care system is able to provide everyone with the care they need.



Once health authorities and governments learn how a new disease spreads, they can advise what steps people need to take to avoid coming into contact with it. The Provincial Health Officer might make certain steps mandatory by turning them into orders under the **Public Health Act**. It is important that individuals follow these orders, as well as the guidance provided by the Provincial Health Officer, the Ministry of Health and health authorities. Flattening the curve can only be accomplished by the actions of individuals.

UNDERSTAND SELF-ISOLATION

During a pandemic, people who are exposed to the disease may be required to **self-isolate**. This means staying home and avoiding situations where you could come in contact with others.

Self-isolation is an important measure in stopping the spread of a pandemic. The length of self-isolation depends on the illness.



ADD TO YOUR EMERGENCY KIT

You may have to self-isolate without much warning, and having food and supplies on hand will make this easier. This is where your emergency kit (from **page 8**) comes in handy.

When you learn that a pandemic is developing, it's a good idea to check your emergency kit and restock it if necessary. You may want to add a few additional things, in case you must self-isolate and are unable to arrange the delivery of groceries or other supplies within a week. Buying far more than you need because you are concerned about shortages (panic buying) can result in other people not getting enough.

TIP: If you take regular medication, talk with your pharmacist about how you can maintain a consistent supply. Try to stay in the habit of refilling your prescriptions 1-2 weeks before they run out.

FIND A PANDEMIC BUDDY

It can be helpful to find someone outside your household to count on if you and your family must self-isolate. They could run errands for you, such as delivering your groceries or picking up medications:

Full name

Contact info

TIP: One of your emergency contacts from **page 14** might be a great choice for a pandemic buddy!

TIP: If you live alone, you and your buddy may also want to agree to check in on one another every now and again just to make sure you're doing well.

PLAN FOR CHILDCARE

During a pandemic, schools and daycare facilities may be shut down as a measure to flatten the curve.

You may need to plan around this if you have children. Depending on your line of work, this could include making arrangements with your workplace to work from home or developing a modified work schedule.

MAKE A PLAN WITH YOUR "BUBBLE"

During a pandemic you may be asked to limit your contact with people and form a "bubble." Your pandemic bubble will be the people you continue to have close contact with (usually the people you live with). This is another measure to help flatten the curve.



You may decide that you want other people to come and live with you during the pandemic (e.g. join your household bubble), such as family members or a close friend. If public health says it's alright, you may also expand your bubble to include another family or close friends that don't live with you.

The key thing to remember is all members of a bubble must be on the same page. For example, people from your bubble should not have close contact with people outside your bubble.

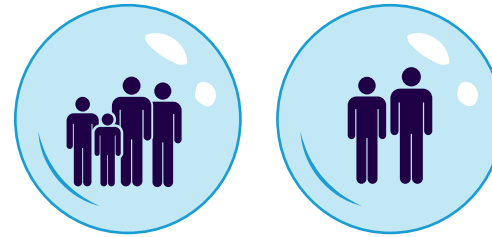
PLAN FOR VULNERABLE MEMBERS

If you have vulnerable members in your bubble, it is important to make a plan to keep them safe. For example, if members of your bubble are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill due to their age or health conditions, you should consider keeping your bubble small.

You should also plan to support the self-isolation of vulnerable members of your bubble. One example would be having a delivery plan for groceries and essentials.

Staying with your bubble looks like this...

Two separate "bubbles" are keeping their distance from each other and avoiding close contact, which helps slow the spread of a disease.



When you leave your bubble...

By leaving your bubble and coming into close contact with someone outside your bubble, you may risk coming into contact with the disease and bringing it back to those you live with.



During a Pandemic

A pandemic may last for several years, depending on how long it takes to develop a vaccine and stop the spread of the disease. Staying prepared throughout the pandemic is essential.

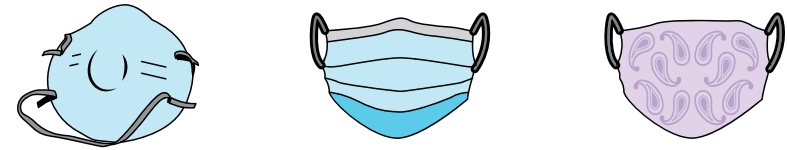
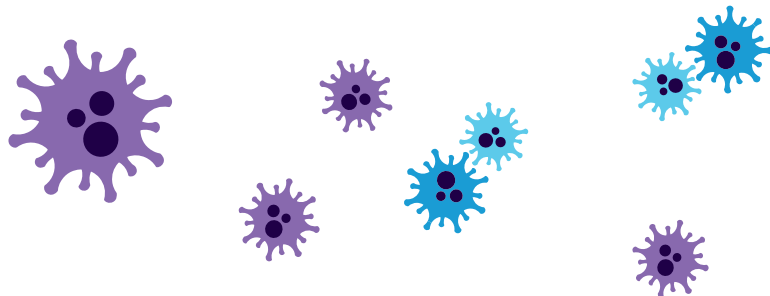
STAY INFORMED

As a pandemic progresses, we learn more and more about the illness. This means that advice to keep yourself and others safe may change and evolve. It's important to keep listening to updates from public health agencies (see **page 15**) and continue to follow their guidance.

Keep up to date on symptoms of the illness, as well as how to get tested if you think you are sick. Catching symptoms early can help ensure you get the medical attention you need, and also helps ensure you won't spread the illness to others.

MAINTAIN YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

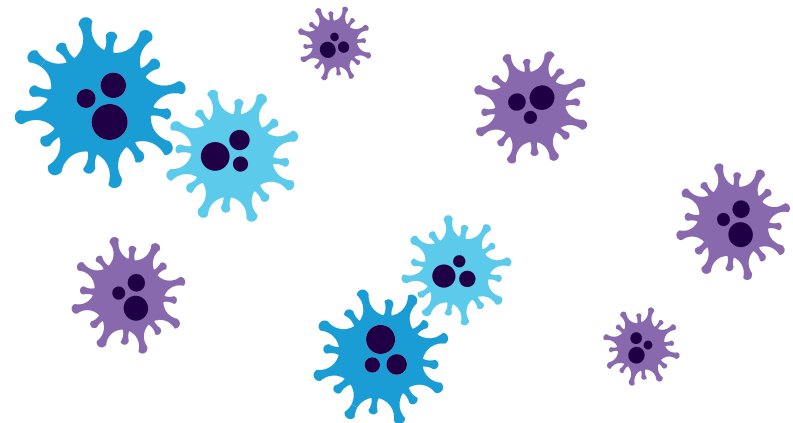
As mentioned earlier, one of the best defenses against a disease is a healthy immune system and good physical health. Continue to maintain a healthy diet, proper rest and physical activity (see **page 12**).



KNOW WHEN TO WEAR FACE MASKS

The spread of some diseases can be slowed when people wear face masks. Wearing a mask can help stop droplets and airborne particles from spreading from your nose and mouth.

If directed by public health authorities (see **page 15**), wear a face covering when you are out in public or where it's difficult to stay a safe distance away from people outside your bubble. During a global pandemic there can be challenges in ensuring that healthcare workers have all the equipment they need to safely provide patient care. For this reason, members of the general public may be asked to use non-medical masks, such as cloth masks.





COPING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY

A pandemic may make us feel confused, sad and anxious. Self-isolation may separate us from activities to help manage our feelings. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, you are not alone. Here are some things you can do to manage.

Take care: Eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep lowers stress and helps us cope.

Stay connected: Stay connected with family, friends and coworkers, following the guidance of public health. Even if you can't connect with people in-person, online video calls (such as Zoom and Facebook Messenger Rooms) or phone calls are a great way to stay in touch and feel less isolated.

Help others: Find safe ways to help your community, like volunteering to check in on the elderly by phone. Assisting others can help you regain a sense of purpose and community as you confront the challenges together.

Reach out: Talking helps, whether it's with family, friends, a doctor or counsellor. Crisis lines are available to listen and help any time. You can contact:

- BC Mental Health Support Line, available 24 hours a day at 310-6789 (no area code).
- KUU-US Indigenous Crisis Line at 1-800-588-8717.

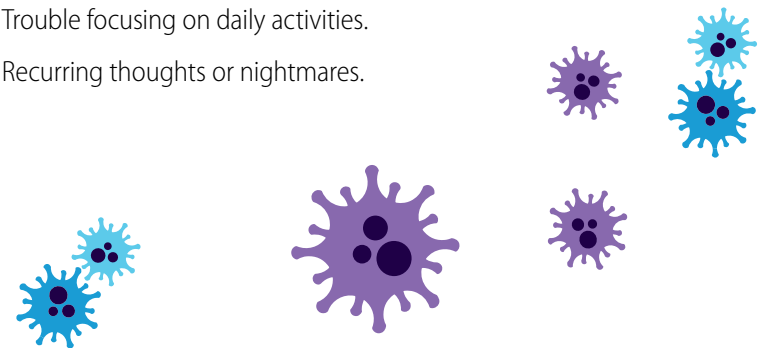
PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE

Fear and anxiety are natural reactions to stressful events and can stir up past traumas. To help yourself and your loved ones:

- Accept offers of help. Seek counselling or spiritual guidance.
- Focus on positive memories and the skills you've used to get through other hard times.
- Be aware of how children are reacting. Reassure them and encourage them to express themselves.
- Give yourself and your loved ones permission to grieve.
- Practice cultural or spiritual customs that bring you comfort.

With support, most people recover within a few weeks. However, some will need more time and help to heal. Watch for warning signs of extended anxiety and contact a medical professional or trusted community leader if they last more than two to four weeks:

- Trouble with eating and sleeping.
- Feeling depressed or hopeless; showing low energy or crying often.
- Being anxious and fearful.
- Trouble focusing on daily activities.
- Recurring thoughts or nightmares.



CLEAN AND DISINFECT REGULARLY

Regular cleaning and disinfecting can help prevent the spread of illness. Frequently touched surfaces such as toilets, sink tap handles, doorknobs, light switches, and tables should be cleaned at least daily. Other less frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly when visibly dirty. Make sure to clean surfaces with soap or detergent before disinfecting. Cleaning and disinfecting is a simple, effective, two-step process:

Step 1: Clean away dirt, crumbs, etc.

Use soapy water to wipe away dirt, soils and other debris. Plain dish soap or any kind of household cleaning product will remove dirt, oils and other debris from surfaces.

Step 2: Disinfect

With store-bought disinfectants:

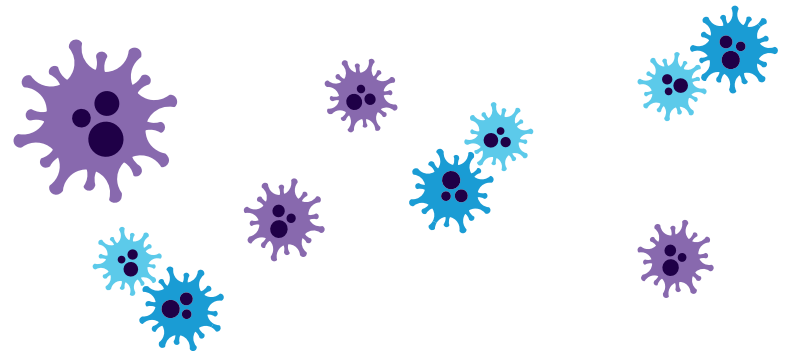
If possible, use store-bought disinfectants deemed effective by public health authorities and follow the directions on the label.

With bleach:

If store-bought disinfectants are not available, you can mix household bleach with room temperature water (do not use hot water) in specific ratios to disinfect areas in your home. Follow the advice of public health authorities on how to use bleach for this purpose.

TIPS FOR USING DISINFECTANTS AND BLEACH SAFELY

- Open a window and wear gloves when disinfecting.
- Take care to rinse the equipment that you use to make your bleach solution and keep bleach tightly-sealed and stored away from children and pets.
- More concentrated solutions are not better and may cause irritation to the eyes and throat.
- Do not mix bleach with vinegar or other acids like lemon juice, ammonia-containing products (such as Windex), or rubbing alcohol. This can create toxic gases.
- When using bleach on surfaces, allow the surface to air dry completely before using again.
- Dispose of any leftover bleach mixtures so people won't mistake them for something else or mix them with other products by mistake. If you pour your extra bleach solutions down the drain, run a lot of water down the drain at the same time.



What to do if...

You are a health care worker

Stay up to date on infection prevention and control policies and procedures at your workplace.

You have a family member in a long-term care or assisted living facility

Keep in mind that visitors may not be allowed at certain times during a pandemic. Find ways to stay connected with your loved ones such as phone calls or video chats.

You don't have a place to live

Following public health guidance during a pandemic, such as physical distancing and regular handwashing, can be challenging when you don't have a place to live. In addition, some services you depend on may have to close or reduce services. During a pandemic, the government may offer new programs and supports to people who are unsheltered.

You are experiencing violence

If you or someone you know is experiencing violence, there is immediate crisis support for victims of family or sexual violence. VictimLink BC's 24/7 telephone service offers help in multiple languages. Call 1-800-563-0808 or by email VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca. You'll be referred to the closest service agency. Your immediate safety is more important than maintaining public health measures such as physical distancing or self-isolation.

You use substances

Avoid sharing supplies, such as cigarettes, joints, pipes, injecting equipment, containers for alcohol, utensils and other supplies. If you have to share, wipe pipes with alcohol wipes or use new mouthpieces. Wash your hands or use wipes before preparing, handling or using your drugs. Prepare your drugs yourself. Clean surfaces with soap and water, alcohol wipes, bleach or hydrogen peroxide before preparing drugs if possible. Carry naloxone and have an overdose plan. Buddy up when you are using, but stay a safe distance apart. Using with a buddy is safer than using alone.

You have a chronic health condition

Your health condition may put you at higher risk of severe symptoms during a pandemic. Speak to your health care provider about the measures you should take to protect your health. If you are going to have to limit your time outside of the home, ask friends and family members to do things like deliver groceries. Work with your healthcare providers to ensure you have a plan to continue with regular appointments and medications.

You have a disability

People living with disabilities may be especially impacted by a pandemic if the services and social structures they depend on are disrupted. If you are a person with a disability, seek out information on programs that can support you during the pandemic. If you live alone, make sure you find a trusted pandemic buddy who can assist you with your day to day needs such as grocery deliveries.

PreparedBC: www.PreparedBC.ca

World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int

Public Health Agency of Canada: canada.ca/en/public-health

BC Centre for Disease Control: www.bccdc.ca

Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA): www.phsa.ca

First Nations Health Authority: www.fnha.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division: cmha.bc.ca

HealthLinkBC: www.healthlinkbc.ca

Fraser Health: fraserhealth.ca

Interior Health: interiorhealth.ca

Island Health: islandhealth.ca

Northern Health: northernhealth.ca

Vancouver Coastal Health: vch.ca

Notes:



PreparedBC

This material has been prepared by the Province of British Columbia in cooperation with:



Ministry of
Health



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

