

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND COVID-19



While diseases can make anyone sick, some Canadians are more at risk of getting an infection and developing severe complications due to their health, social and economic circumstances.

Organizations, staff and volunteers play an important role in helping to prevent these populations from getting or spreading the COVID-19 virus. Start by sharing simple things they can do to help keep themselves and others healthy, guide them to help if they develop any signs and **symptoms** and learn ways help care for sick clients recovering from COVID-19.



Vulnerable populations may include:

Anyone who is:

- ▶ an older adult
- ▶ at risk due to underlying medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, cancer)
- ▶ at risk due to a compromised immune system from a medical condition or treatment (e.g. chemotherapy)

Anyone who has:

- ▶ difficulty reading, speaking, understanding or communicating
- ▶ difficulty accessing medical care or health advice
- ▶ difficulty doing preventive activities, like frequent hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes
- ▶ ongoing specialized medical care or needs specific medical supplies
- ▶ ongoing supervision needs or support for maintaining independence
- ▶ difficulty accessing transportation
- ▶ economic barriers
- ▶ unstable employment or inflexible working conditions
- ▶ social or geographic isolation, like in remote and isolated communities
- ▶ insecure, inadequate, or nonexistent housing conditions

How organizations can support vulnerable populations during COVID-19 outbreaks

Take the time to learn the facts:

- ▶ Know more about COVID-19 by visiting canada.ca/coronavirus
- ▶ Keep up-to-date about the current situation in your community.
- ▶ Contact local, provincial, territorial public health officials to get relevant COVID-19 information, resources and guidance.

Take time to get prepared:

- ▶ Review your business continuity plan so you and your staff know what to do.
- ▶ Plan ahead for potential disruptions.
- ▶ Identify and plan how to continue providing the most critical services.
- ▶ Partner with organizations that provide similar services to share resources and strategies.
- ▶ Be prepared to answer questions from staff, volunteers, and clients.
- ▶ Consider stockpiling **general supplies and cleaning supplies**.
- ▶ Prepare for shelters and communal space limitations.

Educate staff about ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- ▶ **Washing hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the washroom and when preparing food.
 - Use alcohol-based **hand sanitizer** if soap and water are not available.
- ▶ Increasing access to hand hygiene and cough etiquette supplies (e.g., alcohol-based hand rub, soap, paper towels, tissues, waste containers).
- ▶ Cleaning frequently used spaces, surfaces and objects (kitchens, common areas, dining areas, desks, shared sleeping spaces, doorknobs, and faucets).
- ▶ Maintain **physical distancing**, keeping at least 2 metres from other people.
- ▶ Staying home when sick.
- ▶ Avoiding the use of shared personal items.
- ▶ Sharing information about what to do if staff or a client shows **symptoms** of becoming sick.
- ▶ Sharing steps about **how to care for and isolate people living in a crowded facility** (including the use of separate washrooms, if available).
- ▶ Sharing information about **how to care for People with Disabilities**.
- ▶ Sharing information about **providing services for people experiencing homelessness**.

Suggestions for supporting vulnerable populations during COVID-19 outbreaks

Provide clear instructions about how to wash hands and cover coughs using:

- ▶ the most commonly used language in the community
- ▶ short messages that explain simple steps they can take
- ▶ large font and graphics
- ▶ accessible instructions (e.g., braille, pictorial)
- ▶ by posting signs in common areas near sinks, entrances, intake areas, restrooms, sleeping areas, recreation areas, waiting rooms

Consider supporting alternatives such as:

- ▶ using volunteer drivers and subsidized taxi fares instead of public transportation
- ▶ putting in place alternative outreach measures or a “buddy” system
- ▶ including policies to allow sick clients to rest in shelters during the day
- ▶ providing access to food, drinks and supplies, as possible
- ▶ reminding clients to fill or refill prescriptions, and necessary medical supplies



Organizations that support older adults, those at risk due to underlying medical conditions or those with a compromised immune system are strongly advised to:

- ▶ work with staff to limit their work to a single facility, and limit the locations in the facility in which the employees work.
 - require all staff and visitors to wear a **non-medical mask or face covering** (i.e. made with at least two layers of tightly woven fabric, **constructed** to completely cover the nose and mouth without gaping, and secured to the head by ties or ear loops) to help prevent the spread of potentially infectious respiratory droplets from a person that may not be showing **symptoms** of COVID-19 to other people (and the contamination of surfaces). Non-medical masks or face coverings provide an extra barrier when physical distancing cannot be ensured.
- ▶ not allow visits and non-essential on-site services to their facilities, except under compassionate or special circumstances
 - if visitors or service workers are required, screen them for fever, cough or difficulty breathing, and deny entry if symptomatic
- ▶ maintain a high level of vigilance to ensure that staff do not go to work with symptoms
 - do not allow workers to come in to work if they have symptoms
 - screen staff for symptoms before every shift, and
 - send staff home immediately if they develop symptoms during a shift
- ▶ permit entry without screening for emergency first responders in emergency situations
- ▶ discontinue any planned outings for residents – essential medical appointments would ideally be the only exception
- ▶ follow the recommendations for preventing the transmission of infections, including COVID-19, developed by your relevant provincial or territorial health authority

If you suspect a client is sick from COVID-19, please contact your local **public health authority**.

**WE CAN ALL DO OUR
PART IN PREVENTING
THE SPREAD OF
COVID-19. FOR MORE
INFORMATION, VISIT**

Canada.ca/coronavirus
or contact
1-833-784-4397

