

COVID-19 and Asthma — Health Recommendations for People with Asthma

Updated May 20, 2020

At this time, the [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#) has noted there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes for Canadians:

- aged 65 and over
- with compromised immune systems
- with underlying medical conditions

Canadians are advised to avoid all non-essential travel.

As the situation develops around the globe, you can find the most up-to-date information for people in Canada on the [Government of Canada's website](#). Be sure to also check provincial and local authorities for information specific to your location.

You might be wondering what COVID-19 means for you, or your loved ones with asthma. When people with asthma get respiratory infections, it can trigger their asthma symptoms. Most people recover from COVID-19 after a period of rest, that may extend up to 14 days. In some, it can be more severe and, in rare cases, life-threatening. The symptoms are similar to other much more common illnesses such as a cold or flu, and include:

- cough;
- high temperature or fever,
- shortness of breath.

Data is not yet conclusive, but it appears that people of all ages can be infected by the virus, which causes respiratory disease. People with underlying chronic conditions appear to be more at risk of severe effects.

Medication Recommendations

Asthma Canada recommends that Canadians with asthma ensure they renew or refill their asthma prescriptions with a 30-day supply so that they don't run out of medication, should they become ill.

Consult your healthcare provider days before you think you will run out of medications. Order your refills from the pharmacy at least one week in advance to be sure the medication is available.

If your medication is not available, your healthcare provider or pharmacist will assist you in developing a plan for replacing your medication. There are a number of different inhaled and oral medications that could be considered. Your pharmacist or healthcare provider should be able to advise you of the most appropriate alternative treatment plan in the event of a medication shortage.

If you normally order a prescription for *more* than 30 days of medication, you may find your pharmacist only dispenses a 30-day supply so that medications do not run out due to people stockpiling.

Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medication shortages. Do not rely on information found online.

Any changes made to 30-day refill prescriptions will increase the number of prescriptions and dispensing fees. However, provincial and territorial governments are currently setting limits in place to offset the cost. Speak to your pharmacist about cost and billing, or consult the Ministry of Health for your jurisdiction.

Asthma Canada recommends that Canadians with asthma continue to take their prescribed asthma medications unless their healthcare provider has advised otherwise. Stopping medication without consulting your healthcare provider is dangerous. Do not stop or modify your asthma medications because of concern about COVID-19. This includes biologics.

Non-medical Face Masks

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that Canadians wear non-medical face masks while in public spaces where physical distancing cannot be maintained – such as public transit, or the grocery store.

Wearing a face mask is NOT a substitute for physical distancing or frequent handwashing.

Wearing a non-medical face mask is an *extra* measure that can be taken to protect those around you. When worn properly, a person wearing a non-medical mask or face covering can reduce the spread of his or her own infectious respiratory droplets.

Before wearing a non-medical face mask, follow procedure for wearing your mask safely. Read information about [appropriate use of non-medical masks](#), and [how to properly place, remove and clean a non-medical mask](#) from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

A bandanna can be used if you do not have a mask with a breathable fiber. Do not use N95 masks, as they are reserved for health care providers and emergency service workers.

Below are some tips for wearing a non-medical mask when you have asthma:

- If wearing a mask inhibits your ability to breathe in any way, do not wear a mask. **However, you must ensure you are maintaining physical distancing and practising good hand hygiene.**
- Wearing a mask means breathing hot and humid air which can trigger asthma symptoms made worse by wearing a face covering. If this happens to you, try to limit the length of your trips, and plan to go out during cooler periods of the day.
- Write a list of errands/items you need to purchase so you can plan your trip as efficiently as possible while wearing a mask.
- Since recommendations are to wear a mask before going out in public for any length of time, get used to it by wearing a face mask around the house for 20 minutes to give yourself time to adjust to how it feels.

Asthma Management Recommendations

To protect yourself and reduce your risk of asthma symptoms, follow these simple asthma management steps:

- Keep taking your controller medication daily or as prescribed. This will help cut your risk of an asthma attack being triggered by any respiratory virus, including COVID-19.
- Carry your reliever inhaler with you every day, in case your asthma symptoms flare up.
- Monitor your asthma symptoms closely and follow your Asthma Action Plan to help you recognize and manage asthma symptoms, and know when to seek advice from your healthcare provider or emergency help.
- Take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest and fluids, and eat good nutritious food.
- Reach out to Asthma Canada's Asthma & Allergy Helpline call-back service to connect with a Certified Respiratory Educator if you have questions about managing your asthma. Call 1-866-787-4050 or email info@asthma.ca

Below are also some straightforward steps everyone can take to lower the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19:

- [Practice social distancing/self-monitoring/self-isolation/isolation](#) as directed by [the Public Health Agency of Canada](#).
- Maintain a 2-metre physical distance from others in public.
- When physical distancing cannot be maintained, consider wearing a non-medical mask or homemade face covering.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer with minimum 60% alcohol base if soap is not available.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm, not your hand.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, ears or mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, such as toys, phones and door handles. Launder frequently used items like bedding and plush toys often.
- Stay home if you are sick. Encourage those you know who are sick to stay home until they no longer have symptoms.
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

- Make sure that you get high-quality information about COVID-19 from reliable sources. [The Public Health Agency of Canada](#) is a reliable source of information, as are provincial and territorial public health authorities.