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FAQs: COVID-19 & Diabetes

(sources: WHO COVID-19 & Diabetes Canada websites 2020-Mar-25)

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80 per cent) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around one out of every six people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can contract COVID-19 from others who have the virus. It is spread from an infected person through

- Respiratory droplets generated when you cough or sneeze
- Close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands
- Touching something with the virus on it (such as objects and surfaces), then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands
- People can also contract COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. Therefore, it is important to stay at least 6 feet (2 metres) away from a person who is sick

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

Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be transmitted through the air?

Studies to date suggest that the virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets rather than through the air.

How does COVID-19 affect those living with diabetes?

COVID-19 can cause more severe symptoms and complications in some people living with diabetes, the elderly, and those with other chronic conditions such as heart disease & lung disease. It is important to minimize this risk by being proactive with your prevention strategies.

How can I prevent infection?

Public health agencies in Canada and world-wide have described actions that can help prevent the spread of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses.

Take these steps to reduce exposure to the virus and protect your health:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with soap and water
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve; when using tissues, immediately dispose of them into the garbage as soon as possible and wash your hands afterwards
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Regularly clean commonly used surfaces and devices you touch or handle.
- Try to avoid contact with people who are showing symptoms of respiratory illness, such as coughing
- Check national travel advice before planning or taking trips
- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health-care provider
- If you have a scheduled visit with your health-care provider, contact them via phone/or portal first to see what other options you may have (many clinics have increased their use of telemedicine) as visiting a clinic can increase your risk of being exposed to the virus. Follow the advice of your health-care provider

The public health authorities are emphasizing that if you think you might be sick, stay home from work or school.

I have diabetes and I think I may be infected. What do I do?

COVID-19 can cause more severe symptoms and complications in some people living with diabetes, as well as in older people, and those with other chronic health conditions.

If you have diabetes and you have symptoms such as a cough, high temperature and feeling short of breath, you need to continue taking your medication and contact your primary care physician or local [Public Health Authority](#).

For those who routinely monitor their blood glucose, on the advice of their clinical team, they should continue to do this more often.

If you have diabetes and you become unwell for any reason, it is important that you practice [sick day management](#) which can include:

- Maintaining open communication with your primary care provider and diabetes care team. They are an excellent resource if you have questions or concerns about your personal health management
- Following the advice of your diabetes care team regarding medication usage, if you are feeling unwell
- Being aware of the signs and symptoms of [hypoglycemia](#) and [hyperglycemia](#), as effective blood glucose management can become a challenge when sick
- Staying hydrated and having unsweetened drinks on hand; and practicing eating smaller portions but more often

The risk of death from coronavirus is quite low, and most people with COVID-19 will have a comparatively mild illness. Should you have further questions, we recommend contacting your primary care physician or local public health authority.

Should I stop taking certain blood pressure medications because I've heard that these drugs may affect my risk of COVID-19 infection?

No. Blood pressure control is an essential part of managing diabetes. In addition, certain blood pressure lowering medications[(a class of medications known as angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE-i) or Angiotensin Receptor Blockers (ARBs)] are often recommended for people living with diabetes to protect them from kidney and heart-related complications, even in the absence of high blood pressure. At the present time, there is no confirmed scientific link between these blood pressure medications and the risk of COVID-19 infection or its complications. Medications such as ibuprofen, used

occasionally in people with diabetes who have arthritic conditions, should continue to be used.

Please do NOT stop or change any of your medications without discussing with your health-care team.

If you become ill (unable to eat or drink properly) for any reason, there are certain actions that have been shown to reduce your risk of other problems. Please review this document for practical things to do to [stay safe when you have diabetes and are sick or at risk of dehydration](#).

How can I prepare in the event I become infected and have diabetes?

Everyone should have a plan in case they or a loved one becomes ill. For people living with diabetes, this is very important.

Your plan may include:

- Gather the contact information for your doctors, clinic, pharmacy and your insurance
- Write down the names and doses of your medications
- Have enough medication for one-two weeks in case you cannot get to the pharmacy to refill your prescriptions
- Ensure you have enough device supplies as well (i.e. pump supplies, pen supplies, monitor
- supplies, etc.)
- Ensure all your medications have refills available, so you do not have to leave the house if you become ill
- Have extra supplies like rubbing alcohol, hand sanitizers and soap to wash your hands
- Keep simple sugars (i.e. glucose tablets) on-hand in case you need to treat low blood sugar which may occur more frequently with illness due to changes to eating patterns
- Have glucagon available in case of a significant low blood sugar (if taking insulin or medications that can cause low blood sugar)
- Have ketone strips available in case of illness (if you have type 1 diabetes)

Where do I go to find out more information on COVID-19?

As diabetes is a chronic disease, questions and concerns about the impact of COVID-19 are understandable. BCDiabetes Canada is following Health Canada's

recommendations for COVID-19 and monitoring their ongoing information, as updates become available.