

COVID-19 IN MANITOBA

Manitoba has implemented a number of changes to better protect the health of Manitobans. They include:

- declaring a state of emergency in Manitoba;
- issuing public health orders to:
 - limit public gathering to less than 10 people including places of worship, family event, wedding and funerals;
 - require retailers to ensure separation of two metres between patrons in their facility;
 - close hospitality premises such as restaurants to customers, but still allow take out or curbside pickup of food as of April 1;
 - order the closure of non-critical services as of April 1, with details on exceptions available at https://news.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/newslinks/2020/03/BG-PHA_-_COVID-19-PR.pdf;
 - immediate closures of bingo and gaming centres, as well as wellness centres such as gyms and fitness centres; and
 - recommending cancellation of domestic or international travel.
- suspending services at licensed child-care centres effective at end-of-day March 20 to April 12;
- working to create dedicated child-care options for front-line and essential service staff;
- suspending classes in Manitoba kindergarten to Grade 12 schools for the remainder of the school year unless public health officials advise they may resume;
- closing casinos;
- recommending the immediate suspension of visitors in long-term care facilities across Manitoba with exceptions for compassionate reasons;
- suspending in-person visits at all Manitoba correctional facilities, with increased access to phone calls;
- greater access to evening and weekend bail hearings as well as increased use of telephone court hearings;
- staff screening at hospitals and long-term care facilities before every shift with additional screening possible if they leave the facility during their shift;

- change in protocol to require health-care workers with patient care roles at facilities, including at hospitals, long-term care facilities, health centres, nursing stations, Access Centres and COVID-19 testing locations, to expand their use of procedure masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE).
- visitor access at all Manitoba hospitals has been suspended, with exceptions for compassionate reasons made on a case-by-case basis;
- for labour and delivery as well as pediatric patients, one visitor is allowed, with stringent screening in place;
- suspending elective (non-urgent) surgical procedures;
- postponing surgeries for patients who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and patients will be contacted directly if their surgery is affected;
- postponing non-essential and routine diagnostic testing including laboratory, imaging and non-invasive cardiac services;
- suspending BreastCheck breast cancer screening services at CancerCare Manitoba for at least two weeks effective March 19;
- suspending adult day programs and similar programming located within long-term care or personal care facilities;
- suspending congregate meal services for Support Services to Seniors program;
- developing virtual visit and virtual care psychotherapy options to supplement traditional models of care including video-conferencing options;
- suspending day programs through Community Living disABILITY Services for adults with intellectual disabilities, with exceptions for exceptional cases;
- limiting prescription refills to 30 days to ensure consistent supply of medications;
- deferring increases in Manitoba Pharmacare deductible rates scheduled for April 1;
- asking Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) clients to contact staff through the call centre whenever possible to follow public health recommendations on public distancing;
- cancelling all planned interpreter-led events and closing interpretive centres until further notice in Manitoba parks;
- developing a new self-assessment tool, which is now online to help Manitobans determine whether they need to call Health Links–Info Santé to get a referral for testing or to self-isolate;
- implementing community screening locations in Winnipeg and rural Manitoba where people can be screened and tested for COVID-19 after a referral from Health Links–Info Santé;
- providing advice on social distancing measures for Manitobans; and
- postponing non-urgent eviction hearings at the Residential Tenancies Branch, and suspending any rent increases scheduled to take effect April 1 or later.

Public health officials are strongly advising all Manitobans, including health-care providers, to cancel or postpone any non-essential travel (domestic or international). In addition, public health officials are recommending all travellers should self-isolate and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after returning to Manitoba from international or other locations in Canada. Exceptions to this include:

- the commercial transportation of goods and services,
- workers who live in a neighbouring jurisdiction and travel to Manitoba for work;
- health-care workers who travel to work from outside the province; and
- normal personal travel in border communities including visits to a cottage.

Health officials are reminding physicians, health-care providers and support staff returning from domestic or international travel that they MUST self-identify to their organization/site's occupational health services.

The online screening tool is now available in an interactive voice response (IVR) format. It is not a replacement for Health Links–Info Santé. It is specifically for Manitobans who prefer to complete the screening tool by phone rather than online.

The tool asks callers standard screening questions for COVID-19. If needed, it directs those who may require a conversation with a health-care professional to Health Links–Info Santé. People who want to self-screen can call (toll-free) 1-877-308-9038.

Community screening sites have opened across the province. These locations are not walk-in clinics. Patients must receive a referral prior to arriving at these sites. Information on locations and hours of operation are available at www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/locations.html.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, all Manitobans have a role to play in slowing its spread and minimizing its impact on the health-care system and in communities. Social distancing strategies for all Manitobans include:

- cancelling or postponing any large-scale events with more than 50 attendees;
- minimizing prolonged (more than 10 minutes), close (less than two metres) contact between other individuals in public;
- avoiding greetings that involve touching such as handshakes;
- disinfecting frequently used surfaces;
- following public health advice related to self-monitoring and self-isolation if you have travelled or have been exposed to someone ill with the virus; and
- avoiding travel, crowded places and events, especially if you are at higher risk.

People are encouraged to take common prevention measures including regular handwashing with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds. Make sure to dry hands thoroughly. Alternatively, people can use an alcohol-based hand cleanser if their hands are not visibly dirty.

People should also cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough or sneeze into their sleeve. Being prepared also means seeking official sources of information to ensure the most up-to-date and accurate information is being used.

Employers should review their business continuity plans and take steps to ensure employees can stay home when ill, without facing barriers such as the requirement for sick notes, and work from home if possible. Employers should also discontinue non-essential, work-related travel outside of Manitoba and encourage virtual meetings to reduce prolonged, close contact between individuals.

The province launched an online tool to safely connect volunteers with Manitobans needing assistance. Manitobans can access www.HelpNextDoorMB.ca directly or at: www.manitoba.ca/COVID19.

There have been reports of multiple phishing scams related to COVID-19. Many are asking people for credit card information to provide medication following positive test results. This is not a call that Manitobans would receive from public health officials. Manitobans are advised not to provide any financial data, hang up on the caller and to report the call to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre at (toll-free) 1-888-495-8501.

Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living is also urging media to exercise caution in reporting information related to the evolving COVID-19 situation and to avoid hearsay or speculation, as this can spread misinformation.