

COVID-19 First Responders and the Novel Coronavirus

Status and Background: **UPDATED**

The number of COVID-19 cases in Canada continues to rise. Local transmission is occurring, and first responders must remain vigilant. Starting March 20th, anyone returning after travelling outside of the province is required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days upon their return to Newfoundland and Labrador.

As you are all aware, the number of active cases in Newfoundland and Labrador are falling. We must remain vigilant to ensure we do not allow the virus to regain traction in our province.

Symptomology: **UPDATED**

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that cause disease in mammals and birds. In humans, symptoms are usually uncomplicated upper respiratory tract infections, however, as more has been learned about this new virus, **new screening symptoms are now identified**. The symptoms used to identify potential COVID-19 patients are defined as two or more of the following (new or worsening):

- Fever (or signs of a fever such as chills, sweats, muscle aches or lightheadedness)
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Painful swallowing
- Runny nose
- Unexplained loss of appetite/diarrhea
- Lost of sense of taste or smell

OR

- Chilblain-like* lesions on feet and/or hands. (This is a stand-alone criteria)

*Chilblain like lesions is defined as small, red or purple spots on hands and/or feet.

The incubation period of COVID-19 appears to be within 14 days but is likely shorter (5-6 days). It is important to note that the severity of the illness is variable and can result in more severe illness for the very young, the very old, immunocompromised patients or patients with underlying disease.

Transmission:

One of the concerning features of this new coronavirus is its ability to spread from human to human. The level of infectiousness, or ease of transmission, is still unclear. The coronavirus appears to spread via close contact (2 meters) with infected people and/or spreads through exposure to the large droplets created from coughing or sneezing. The life span of the virus while outside the body is unknown. Other human coronaviruses can live on contaminated surfaces for up to 7 days. It is important to note that all viruses have an incubation period. The incubation period is the period between the exposure of an individual to a pathogen (virus) and the

beginning of the illness or disease it causes. Recent evidence indicates that the virus can be transmitted to others from someone who is infected but not showing symptoms. This includes people who may have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic) and those who are infected and never develop symptoms (asymptomatic).

While experts know that these kinds of transmissions are happening among those in close contact or in close physical settings, it is not known to what extent. This means it is extremely important to follow the proven preventative measures.

Patient Identification: UPDATED

Despite best efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, cases continue to increase worldwide. Any patient presenting to first responders with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection **MUST** be questioned about their travel history. This includes asking patients:

- Have you travelled outside of Canada **or** the province in the 14 days before onset of illness?
OR
- Have you been in close contact with a confirmed/probable case of COVID-19 or does the patient cohabitate with someone who is under mandated self-isolation?
OR
- Have you had close contact with a person with acute respiratory illness who has travelled outside of Canada or the province in the 14 days before onset of illness?

If the patient answers yes to any of the above questions or displays two of more symptoms of COVID-19, immediately implement droplet and contact precautions by placing a surgical mask on the patient and don the required PPE described below.

Up to date information regarding COVID-19 is contained on the [Government of Newfoundland and Labrador website](#). Please review the documents on the website for further information, as these directions may change.

Protecting yourself:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The purpose of PPE is to interrupt the transmission of infection. Donning (putting on) and doffing (taking off) of PPE should be reviewed. You are at greatest risk to contaminate yourself when removing PPE. If EMS is present, take direction from EMS. If EMS is not present and you respond to a call involving a person suspected of having COVID-19.

- Immediately provide the person with a surgical mask to wear.
- Don the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment
 - AAMI level 2 fluid resistant gown,
 - 12 inch nitrile medical gloves
 - Surgical mask with eye protection. (goggles and surgical mask may be used depending on your profession)

Removing Protective equipment

1. Remove gloves - Clean your hands with alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) or soap and water if they are visibly soiled
2. Remove gown – Again, clean Hands with ABHR or soap and water if they are visibly soiled
3. Remove eye protection
4. Remove mask
5. Again, clean your hands with ABHR or soap and water if they are visibly soiled

Cleaning and disinfection of reusable PPE, such as eye protection, is required after each use. Reusable PPE should be cleaned according to manufacturer's directions.

Bunker gear issued to firefighters is considered as protective as a gown and may be worn by firefighters in situations where gowns would be required. If bunker gear is worn instead of a gown, it should be removed carefully and cleaned and disinfected before next use as per the policies and procedures of the fire service. If bunker gear is grossly contaminated, it should not be worn in the vehicle, but should be removed, bagged and stored for proper cleaning and disinfection as per service policy and procedure

N95 Respirators **UPDATED**

N95 respirators are not required for general care of clients with or suspected of having COVID-19. N95 respirators require the wearer to be fit tested to be effective. A good fit is not ensured unless the wearer is clean-shaven. N95 Respirators are only recommended for aerosol generating procedures. Some aerosol generating medical procedures that first responders may participate in include CPR and bag valve mask ventilation.

An N95 mask is required when first responders are participating in resuscitations of suspected COVID-19 patients. If first responders are unsure of the patient's history or are unable to rule out COVID-19, they should error on the side of caution and don an N95 mask during resuscitations. Please contact your employer about your fit testing status and seek fit testing if required.

Hand Hygiene

Hands should be cleaned with alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) unless visibly soiled. If visibly soiled wash hands with soap and water. ABHR should have a minimum of 70% alcohol. Hand Hygiene is important as the virus may also spread by touching contaminated objects or surfaces and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Transport:

If transporting a suspected COVID-19 patient, the first responder should don the appropriate PPE and ensure the patient wears a surgical mask for the duration of transport.

Post Transport Cleaning/Disinfection

Standard hospital grade disinfectants should be used to clean vehicles and equipment used to transport possible COVID-19 patients. Ensure to follow all manufacturer directions regarding contact and drying times.

Since no disinfectant efficacy test is currently available for COVID-19, it is recommended that a cleaner and disinfectant effective for to the human coronavirus be used. Accelerated hydrogen peroxide is one such cleaner and disinfectant.

Staff must wear the appropriate PPE, as detailed above, while disinfecting vehicle surfaces

General cleaning and disinfection of surfaces

Routine, thorough environmental cleaning and disinfection with a cleaner/disinfectant capable of killing COVID-19 on commonly touched environmental surfaces (door handles, toilet flush handles, light switches, elevator buttons, keyboards, and phone) is important to reduce the risk posed by environmental surfaces.

Post Contact Information:

The following information should help guide you if, through the course of your duties, you encounter a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient:

- If you encounter a patient during your working hours, and the patient is later identified as having COVID-19, Public Health Officials will contact you as a part of contact tracing and provide direction.
- If at any time you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 you should immediately take steps to self-isolate yourself and contact 811 for further advice. Information regarding self-isolation is available [here](#).

LINKS:

Hand Hygiene:

https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/Clean_Hands_Across_NL_All_staff.pps

PPE posters:

https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/PPE_Putting_It_On.pdf

https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/PPE_Taking_It_Off.pdf

How to use hand sanitizer and hand washing:

https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/h1n1_old/how_to_wash_hands_2009.pdf

https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/h1n1_old/how_to_sanitize_hands_2009.pdf