

April 26, 2021

Isolation Guidance for Contacts of COVID-19 and their Families

We are providing this letter to clarify isolation requirements of people identified as contacts of COVID-19 and their families.

With the recent exposures to COVID-19 in Yellowknife, the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer (OCPHO) is collaborating with Yellowknife Public Health to recommend isolation of people who are contacts of a person with COVID-19 and their families. Isolation of contacts is one of the most important measures to protect NWT communities as it prevents the transmission of COVID-19.

Why do contacts have to isolate and how long must they isolate?

Contacts are people who had interactions with a person with COVID-19 infection. This puts them at higher risk of acquiring COVID-19 themselves. We know that people who live in the same home as someone with COVID-19 are at increased risk of developing COVID-19. Other situations like being in the same car or room, or being close to someone with COVID-19 for at least 10 minutes means the person is a contact and has a high chance of developing COVID-19.

Sometimes, out of caution, it is necessary to consider all those who were at the same particular location or event as a person with COVID-19 as contacts because there just isn't enough information to confirm one way or the other.

Most COVID-19 infections develop between 3 and 8 days after an exposure to the virus, but sometimes it may take up to 14 days after exposure to develop COVID-19. Contacts must isolate for a full 14 days from the last time they were exposed to a person in the communicable stage of the infection. Isolation for 14 days means 14 full 24-hour periods. If a person's last exposure was on April 19, 2021 at noon, for example, they can stop isolating on May 3 at noon.

Why do household members have to self-isolate too?

Because COVID-19 passes so easily from one household member to another, the NWT OCPHO advises household members who cannot safely self-isolate away from the contact to also isolate. People living in the same home as a contact have a higher risk of developing COVID-19 themselves. The likelihood of household members of people identified as “contacts” developing COVID-19 is high and risks ongoing transmission of COVID-19 to others. For this reason, we ask household members who cannot safely self-isolate from the contact to also isolate.

What does safely self-isolating at home mean?

People who are contacts should isolate in a way that they cannot pass infection on to others. If they are staying in the same home as others, this means contacts should:

- have a separate bedroom
- not be in the same room as others at the same time, and should not interact with others as they move through a home
- use a dedicated bathroom that no one else uses. If this is not possible, the shared bathroom should be frequently cleaned and disinfected with [household cleaners](#). Please see GNWT guidance on cleaning surfaces, available here:

<https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/services/prevention/cleaning-surfaces>

Also, the contact and other household members should wear [non-medical masks](#) to further reduce the risk of transmission within the home. Please see the GNWT guidance on non-medical masks, available here:

<https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/services/healthy-habits/non-medical-masks>

If household members of the contact can consistently meet the above criteria **they do not have to self-isolate as long as the contact has 2 negative tests – an initial test and a second test 48 hours later. Public health will inform the household when they no longer need to isolate.**

If household members cannot meet these criteria they must isolate for the same duration as the contact - they end the isolation when the contact ends their isolation. If a contact develops symptoms of COVID-19, or develops COVID-19, further assessments are required to determine when the person with symptoms (or with COVID-19) and their household can end self-isolation. If the contact or anyone in the household develops symptoms please stay at home and call public health for guidance.

What if I was a household member of a contact, but the contact left to isolate somewhere else?

If a contact is living with their family, and they weren't "safely self-isolating" and the contact leaves to self-isolate in another location, public health will recommend that the contact have a COVID-19 test 48 hours after they left the home. Current evidence says that COVID-19 can pass from person to person starting about two days before a positive COVID-19 test. So, if a contact leaves a home and their test 48 hours later is negative, the household members where the contact was first isolating can end their self-isolation after confirmation of a negative test. The contact must continue to isolate to complete their 14 days. Public health will contact families and give advice as to when they may end self-isolation.

Does vaccination change the duration that a contact or household member of a contact (who cannot safely self-isolate, as above) must self-isolate for?

COVID-19 vaccines are very effective, preventing about 90- 95% of COVID-19 infections. However, even vaccinated people some risk of developing COVID-19 infections. A vaccinated household member of a person with COVID-19 might have about a 2% chance of developing COVID-19 (compared to 20% in an unvaccinated household member). At present, OCPHO feels that residual risk is still too high and does not recommend changes in the way vaccinated contacts or their household members must isolate. As effective vaccines prevent more COVID-19 infections, the hope is that there will be progressively fewer situations where vaccinated contacts and their households need to self-isolate.

Support during this stressful time

If you or your family members need support during this understandably stressful time, there are resources available to you:

- **NWT Helpline:** The NWT Helpline offers free support to residents, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is 100% confidential and has an option for follow-up calls. To talk to a trained responder, call the NWT Helpline at [1-800-661-0844](tel:1-800-661-0844).

You can also visit the NWT Help Line Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/NWTHelpline/> for wellness information and tips.

- **Kids Help Phone:** If you are 25 years old or younger and need someone to talk to, the Kid’s Help Phone is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Texting and online chat options are also available 24/7.
 - To talk with a counsellor, call the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868
 - To text with a counsellor, **text the word TALK to 686868.**
 - To live chat, visit <https://kidshelpline.ca/live-chat/> and click the “chat” button OR download the Always There App. This chat function is available from 6:00pm – midnight.

- **School Resources:** If you are a student in school, there are also guidance counsellors available to reach out to during school hours.

For general information, visit the Government of Northwest Territories website for more information on COVID-19: <https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/>.

We understand this situation can be stressful, but with your participation in self-isolation, monitoring your symptoms, and getting testing if needed, it will help to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Thank-you for helping to keep your family, friends, and community safe. If you have further concerns, contact the Yellowknife Public Health unit at (867) 767-9120.