

Call 911 if:	Call the Clinic if:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have severe trouble breathing or severe chest pain. • You are very confused or not thinking clearly. • You pass out (lose consciousness). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have new or worse trouble breathing. • Your symptoms are getting worse. • You start getting better and then get worse. • You have severe dehydration such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ having a very dry mouth ○ passing only a little urine ○ feeling very light-headed

General Advice While You Are Ill With COVID-19

Similar to influenza, COVID-19 is most often a longer recovery than “a virus”.

The typical symptoms are cough, fever and fatigue but you may also have breathlessness, muscle aches, sore throat, headache and loss of sense of smell / taste. [Here is a PDF of more detail of what to expect.](#)

- **Rest** – fatigue can be a marker for low oxygen, and it makes sense NOT to do anything that triggers your heart or breathing rate to go up too much. If you have a pulse oximeter it can measure your oxygen levels after different activities to guide the level of activity that is OK for you.
- **Change Positions** - to aid breathing you should change positions to help move secretions and reduce the mechanical work of breathing as much as possible. [Here is a pdf of helpful instructions.](#)
- **Hydrate** – prevent dehydration by drinking more fluid than you usually would as fever, sweating and cough mean you lose more body fluids. As a guide, the colour and volume of your fluid intake should be similar to when you are not ill. If you are not drinking enough your urine will get darker.
- **OTC** such as acetaminophen and honey for a sore throat/cough (avoid in diabetes and young children)

Pulse Oximeter Use

- [PDF Instructions on how to use as pulse oximeter](#)
- [Video on how to use a pulse oximeter](#)

If you have borrowed a pulse oximeter, PLEASE return it at the end of your illness so it can be disinfected and supplied to other patients.

Monitoring your Illness

Your Family Practice team will monitor you regularly (the frequency will depend on your risk or severity of COVID illness). It is helpful if you record your symptoms (including whether they are better or worse), and any information such as pulse oximeter readings, temperature, pulse, and breathing rate to discuss with your healthcare provider.

Self Isolation - if you are:

- **younger than 12 years** (regardless of vaccine status) OR **fully vaccinated and 12 years or older:**
Self isolate or at least **5** days from symptom onset, or date of test (whichever was earlier) and until symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhoea or vomiting) whichever is longer in duration).
- **12 years of age or older and unvaccinated or partly vaccinated immunocompromised** (any age and vaccine status)
Self isolate for **10** days from the onset of symptoms, or date of test (whichever was earlier).

Click here for more [Information on Self Isolation and Caring for a Person with COVID](#)

Your Contacts

- Notify any contacts that you have had from 48 hours prior to when your symptoms started (if you have symptoms) or your test date (if you do not have symptoms). The length of time your contacts needs to self-isolate depends on where they live/work, their vaccination status, and age.
- For more information on close contacts and isolation guidelines, visit: <https://www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus/close-contacts>
- After you recover, it is still very important to continue following public health measures. Continue to practice physical distancing and mask wearing.

Mental Health and Other COVID-19 Resources

- <https://hfam.ca/patient-resources/>

COVID-19 Symptom Timeline: Why Days 5 to 10 Are So Important When You Have Coronavirus

Tracking your daily symptoms can help you and your doctors make better decisions about whether a hospital visit is needed.

- To monitor COVID-19, it is important to mark your calendar at the first sign of illness, and regularly track your fever and oxygen levels.
- **Day 5-10** of COVID-19 are often the most worrisome time for respiratory complications, particularly for older patients and those with underlying conditions like high blood pressure, obesity or diabetes.
- The best way to monitor your health during this time is to use a **pulse oximeter**. It is a small device that clips on your finger and measures your blood oxygen levels.
 - ** Normal oxygen saturation range is about 96 to 99 percent. Call your doctor if your blood oxygen reading drops to 92 percent or less
- While at home, you can increase the flow of oxygen to your lungs by not resting on your back, as outlined in the proning resource available on the gbfht.ca website, or in your patient package if applicable
- Resting on your stomach can open parts of the lungs that are compressed when lying on your back. You can also change to resting on your left side or right side, or sit upright in a chair.

Timeline of COVID-19 Symptoms:

Note: symptoms can appear at any time – always consult with a doctor or nurse practitioner for guidance about your specific case if needed

Days 1-3

- Early symptoms of COVID-19 vary widely. It can start with a tickle in your throat, a cough, fever, headache and feeling winded or just a little pressure in your chest
- Sometimes it begins with a bout of diarrhea
- Some people just feel tired and lose their sense of taste and smell
- Many people have several symptoms but no fever
- Some patients with gastrointestinal symptoms go on to develop respiratory symptoms, while others don't

Days 4-6

- Some patients never develop more than mild symptoms, or none at all
- Others begin to feel terrible, with an ever-present fever, aches, chills, cough and an inability to get comfortable
- Some younger patients with mild disease may develop rashes, including itchy red patches, swelling or blistering on the toes or fingers, similar to frostbite

Days 7-8

- For patients with mild illness, the worst is over after a week
- Patients who have felt terrible may get worse. And some patients might start to feel better briefly then take a turn for the worse
- *Patients should monitor their oxygen levels and **check in with a doctor if they start to feel unwell**

Days 8-12

- Monitoring should continue for the second week of illness. Patients may feel better sleeping on their stomachs or sides
- Monitor for worsening symptoms including increasing shortness of breath, worsening cough
- Your home oxygen monitoring monitor can signal if you need additional medical attention

Days 13-14

- Patients who had mild illness should be well recovered
- Patients who had worse symptoms, but maintained normal oxygen levels, should feel mostly recovered after two weeks, although many patients report lingering fatigue and other issues
- Doctors advise a slow return to activity, even if you had mild or moderate illness
- Patients with severe symptoms and those who needed additional treatment because of low oxygen may still feel unwell and fatigued and take far longer to recover

Do not hesitate to seek medical attention if you feel that your condition is worsening!

COVID-19 Home Monitoring Program: Timed Position Changes Instructions

Timed Position Changes: You can use the monitor to check your oxygen saturations 15 minutes after each position change to ensure oxygen saturation has not decreased.

- Please try to not spend a lot of time lying flat on your back. Lying on your stomach and in different positions will help your body to get air into all areas of your lungs
- It is recommended to change your position every 30 minutes to 2 hours rotating as below. Please note sitting up is better than lying on your back.
- Continue to monitor oxygen saturations at 8AM and 1PM.
 1. 30 minutes to 2 hours lying fully prone (bed flat)
 2. 30 minutes to 2 hours lying on right side (bed flat)
 3. 30 minutes to 2 hours sitting up (30-60 degrees) by adjusting head of the bed
 4. 30 minutes to 2 hours lying on left side (bed flat)
 5. 30 minutes to 2 hours lying prone again
 6. Continue to repeat the cycle...

In pictures:

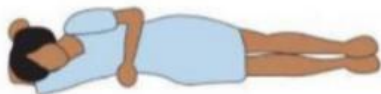
1. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying fully prone (bed flat)



4. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying on your left side (bed flat)



2. 30 minutes – 2 hours: lying on your right side (bed flat)



5. Then back to Position 1. Lying fully prone (bed flat)



3. 30 minutes – 2 hours: sitting up (30-60 degrees) by adjusting head of the bed



Pulse Oximetry- Patient Instructions for use

Pulse oximeters are medical devices that use red and infrared light to determine how much oxygen is circulating in your blood. The device is designed like a clip that covers the tip of your finger. Pulse oximeters measure your oxygen level and your heart rate. They must be positioned properly and used on fingers with good circulation.

How to use

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Ensure that your hands are clean and relatively warm.
3. Remove any nail polish, artificial nails bandages or anything else covering your nails.
4. If your fingers are cold, warm your fingers by running them under good warm water or with a warm cloth, and by rubbing them – the oximeter needs good circulation to the finger to give an accurate reading.
5. Open the pulse oximeter like a clothes pin. Do not force it, it should open easily and just wide enough to allow your finger to fit inside.
6. Slide your forefinger or middle finger from either hand as far in as it will easily advance.
7. The pulse oximeter will turn on automatically when you insert your finger, the display may flash as it obtains the reading.
8. While waiting for the numbers to stabilize, check the battery indicator on the display. If the battery is low, contact _____ for advice.
9. Try to keep your hand relaxed and still while the pulse oximeter is measuring your oxygen level. There may be a small light or bar that illuminates every time your heart beats.
10. After about 1 minute record your oxygen level. The top number on the display is your oxygen level, the other number is your heart rate.
11. Remove the pulse oximeter from your finger. The device will turn off automatically and is ready to use again.

If the numbers are not displayed consistently:

- Make sure that your finger is all the way inside the oximeter
- Try another finger if still not reading
- Ensure the finger is warm, do not clench your fist, and keep your hand still.

Results

The maximum oxygen level is 100% and lower levels indicate that you have less oxygen circulating in your blood. If you have been prescribed home oxygen therapy, note beside the recording whether the measurement was done while using oxygen.

Your care team will advise you what pulse oximetry levels are acceptable for you. Generally, an oxygen level of 93% or greater is acceptable. **If your reading is less than 93% contact your care team.**

If your reading is lower by more than 3% from the previous day try a different finger to check the accuracy. If that reading is the same, contact your care team:

- Ensure that you are sitting and resting in a comfortable position. Loosen any tight clothing. Let someone in your home know that your oxygen level is lower.
- If you have been instructed to use your oxygen, to take any medications or to perform any breathing exercises, do that now.
- If you are very short of breath, feel dizzy, have chest pain or feel very unwell, call 911.

Cleaning

Do not get the oximeter wet. Wipe with a small **alcohol wipe**. Do not use other disinfecting/ antibacterial wipes as they may damage the digital display.