**Social distancing and its different forms.**

**Social distancing**

Social distancing measures are approaches taken to minimize close contact with others in the community and include: quarantine and self-isolation at the individual level as well as other community based approaches (e.g. avoiding crowding, school measures and closures, workplace measures and closures, public/mass gathering cancellations) which are further described in the section titled [community-based measures](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/public-health-measures-mitigate-covid-19.html#cbm) below.

Social distancing measures are likely to have secondary consequences for individuals, families and communities, such as loss of income, an elevated need for support services, and potentially reduced availability of certain services. Some measures require extensive preparation and engagement across sectors. During a pandemic of lesser severity, the infection control benefits of implementing some community measures (e.g., proactive school closures) may not be offset by the cost and societal disruption caused by these measures.

Whenever public health authorities impose restrictions on individual freedoms, the intervention should be proportional to the magnitude of the threat. This principle of 'least restrictive means' should always be a consideration when enacting social distancing measures. The CPIP Public Health Measures Annex outlines the [ethical considerations](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/flu-influenza/canadian-pandemic-influenza-preparedness-planning-guidance-health-sector/public-health-measures.html#a25) with respect to the selection and use of PHMs in a pandemic.

It is crucial that individuals follow quarantine and self-isolation recommendations properly to prevent transmission of COVID-19 to others in the home setting or in the community. It is recommended that all individuals in the community plan ahead by maintaining a supply of essential medications, home supplies and extra non-perishable food in the event they require voluntary quarantine or self-isolation.

* **Isolation** is recommended for a symptomatic individual that is suspected of having, or known to have, COVID-19. They are directed by PHA to isolate themselves in the home-setting and avoid contact with others until PHA has advised that they are no longer considered contagious. Isolation includes:
* Not going out of the home setting. This includes school, work, or other public areas
* Not using public transportation (e.g. buses, subways, taxis)
* Identifying a "buddy" to check on and do errands for each another, especially for those who live alone or at high risk for developing complications.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Having supplies delivered home instead of running errands (supplies should be left on the front door or at least a 2-metre distance maintained between people)
* If leaving the home setting cannot be avoided (e.g. to go to a medical appointment), wear a mask (if not available, cover mouth and nose with tissues) and maintain a 2-metre distance from others. The health care facility should be informed in advance that the person may be infectious.
* **Self-isolation** is recommended for an asymptomatic person, when they have a [high risk of exposure](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-cases-contacts.html#co) to the virus that causes COVID-19, (i.e., through close contact with a symptomatic person or their body fluids). They are asked to self- isolate in the home-setting to avoid contact with others in order to prevent transmission of the virus at the earliest stage of illness (i.e., should they develop COVID-19).
* **Protective self-separation** is recommended for a person who is at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g., older adults, those with chronic underlying medical conditions or immunocompromised) when the virus is circulating in their community.
* **Voluntary avoidance of crowded places** is recommended for a person who is asymptomatic and who is considered to have had a [medium risk of exposure](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-cases-contacts.html#co) to the virus that causes COVID-19. This involves avoiding crowded public spaces and places where rapid self-isolation upon onset of symptoms may not be feasible. Examples of these settings include mass gatherings, such as concerts and sporting events; not including hospitals (for HCWs) and schools.
* **Mandatory quarantine** is the imposed separation or restriction of movement of individuals, groups or communities, for a defined period of time and in a location determined by the PHA. As local circumstances will vary across Canada and within regions, quarantine may be used to contain, delay or mitigate COVID-19, although its effectiveness once there is widespread community transmission is unknown. An individual in mandatory quarantine is asymptomatic but may have been exposed to the virus causing COVID-19. A decision to implement mandatory quarantine requires careful consideration of the safety of the individual/group/community, the anticipated effectiveness, feasibility and implications.

1. The groups at higher risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 is not well understood; however, according to the World Health Organization, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as hypertension, heart disease, or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)