

COVID-19 (coronavirus)

This strain of coronavirus is a new one and scientists do not yet know all there is to know about it so while these common sense advice points will always be helpful **it is important that you keep up to date with the advice being given by your local health authority and how it might affect you personally.** These suggestions have been produced using the most up to date advice available to us and are not intended to replace or supersede advice you may have been given from your health care provider, the local health authority or the government. Our experts tell us that in nearly all cases **lymphedema alone does not make one more susceptible to the coronavirus since this is a respiratory virus.** The only exception would be those very rare primary lymphedema patients who have extensive lymphatic abnormalities involving the chest i.e. lungs, and have generalised immune deficiency; we are assured those patients will know who they are.

- Stay calm. Panic and fear will not help you or those around you.
- The virus spreads mainly from person to person via sneezes and coughs, but we can carry it on our hands and it does survive on hard surfaces for some time – how long depends on a lot of different factors so best to be cautious. Importantly it is thought to be able to survive on fabrics for between 3 and 48 hours, again depending on a lot of different factors.
- The virus gets into your body through your nose, mouth or eyes when someone coughs or sneezes on you or when you have it on your hands or clothes (compression gloves and sleeves included) and then touch your own face.
- The main symptoms are a higher than normal temperature, a cough, aches and pains, unusual tiredness.

Those with lymphedema should take the same precautions as others although this may be more of a challenge if you wear a compression glove as part of your treatment.

Everyone should:

- Wash your hands well before you leave home and wash your hands well when you arrive at your destination. People should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, cleaning your wrists, fingernails, and in between your fingers. If you are not near a sink, you can use hand gel sanitizers that contain at least 60% of alcohol. Wash your hands frequently during the day.
- If you use shared equipment such as keyboards, telephones etc. wipe them with sanitizer wipes that contain at least 60% alcohol between users.
- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.

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- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve at your elbow if you cough or sneeze; then disposing of the used tissue immediately and washing your hands.
- Get into the habit of not touching your face, mouth and eyes.
- Avoid shaking hands or other touching like hugging and kissing.
- Use Hand sanitizer gel with at least 60% alcohol content if hand washing facilities are not available.
- Keep your hands well moisturised as frequent washing can make the skin dry and cracked (which may lead to cellulitis).
- Follow local health authority guidance re large crowds, avoiding certain areas, activities - these may well change as more becomes known about the virus or as more people become infected.
- Current measures in British Columbia include no international travel, social distancing (all people are asked to stay home if at all possible to reduce the risk to self and others in the community), and avoiding crowds larger than 50 people. These recommendations are changing frequently so keep well-informed by reading your local health authority and government recommendations.

If you wear a compression glove or sleeve with hand attachment:

The LSN has spoken to most of the compression garment manufacturers who advise following the washing instructions on your garment but making sure that you wash your garments each day.

- Most garments can be washed in your washing machine at 40 degrees on a gentle wash and then dried on the gentle cycle of your tumble drier. If your garment can not be tumble dried then air dry it thoroughly before use.
- Most garments will stay in peak condition for over 100 washes but putting them in a net washing bag can protect them further.
- We are not sure of the effects of hand sanitizer (60% alcohol or more) on compression garments at this time

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- You may choose to buy some disposable plastic gloves to wear over your compression glove or hand piece while you are out and about. When you arrive at your destination remove the disposable glove by rolling it off your hand so it ends up inside out and throw it away. Then wash your other hand before removing your compression (this will stop your other hand contaminating the compression glove), wash your hands again and reapply your compression.
 - You may choose to wear a disposable glove over your compression glove for longer periods of the day if you are in a job that requires you to wash your hands frequently. Please remember the glove is there to stop your compression glove becoming contaminated, it will not protect you from the virus. The virus can live on the plastic glove and be transferred in the same way as it can on your hand so the same rules apply – wash your hands frequently and change the glove often.
 - Some people may find it a challenge to find a disposable glove to fit over their swollen hand, you may need to experiment with sizes and if you are unable to find one then talk to your lymphedema nurse to see if they feel it would be appropriate for you to modify when you wear your glove, temporarily.
 - When not in your own home avoid using the part of your hand covered by your garment, if possible, and use hand sanitizer gel on your fingers as needed.
- Carry a spare compression glove/garment with you in a sealed plastic bag to use if you are worried your compression glove may have been contaminated, put the dirty one in the plastic bag and seal it up until it can be washed, remembering to throw the plastic bag away.

If you think you may have the virus please refrain from interacting with others until you have sought advice by calling 811.

Produced by the Lymphoedema Support Network 11th, March 2020 - with edits pertinent to Canada by the BC Lymphedema Association.