European Parliament

Canada: Coronavirus movement restrictions and quarantine

Like many other countries around the world, Canada has introduced restrictions in an attempt to slow the spread of Covid-19 in the country. Federal and provincial governments have taken measures to limit international and domestic travel. Canada has prohibited entry to foreign nationals, with a few exemptions. Some provinces and territories have prohibited entry to non-residents and/or imposed self-quarantine on travellers.

Measures taken at the federal level

The Quarantine Act, enacted in 2005 in the aftermath of the SARS outbreak, seeks 'to protect public health by taking comprehensive measures to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases'. It gives power to the Governor in Council to 'make an order prohibiting or subjecting to any condition the entry into Canada of any class of persons who have been in a foreign country or a specified part of a foreign country' (Art. 58(1)). The act also authorises the Minister of Health to establish quarantine stations and quarantine facilities anywhere, and to designate various officers, including quarantine, health, and screening officers (Art. 5 to 7).

Several Orders in Council (OIC) were enacted to prohibit entry into Canada by foreign nationals. On 18 March 2020, OIC 2020-0157 prohibited the entry of any foreign nationals from abroad by means of aircraft. On 26 March 2020, OIC 2020-0184 prohibited foreign nationals from entering Canada if they arrive from a foreign country other than the United States of America (USA). The OIC 2020-0185 extended this prohibition to foreign nationals coming from the USA if they exhibit symptoms of Covid-19 infection (Art. 2(1)), travel for tourism or recreation purposes (Art. 2(3)), or if they have been outside the USA and Canada in the previous 14 days (Art. 4(1)). Provided travellers have no Covid-19 symptoms, the prohibition does not apply to permanent residents, immediate family members, travellers who have only travelled within the USA or Canada in the previous 14 days, and essential service workers. Employers are requested to conduct active daily monitoring of their staff for Covid-19 symptoms (cough, fever or shortness of breath).

Travellers returning to Canada without symptoms must quarantine (self-isolate) for 14 days; those with symptoms may still enter Canada by land, rail or sea, but not by air, and they must isolate without delay for 14 days (see box). Violating any instructions is an offence under the Quarantine Act and could lead to penalties of up to six months in prison and/or CAD750 000 in fines. On 14 April 2020, amendments to the Contraventions Act came into force, providing police with increased flexibility to enforce the Quarantine Act. Police forces can now issue fines ranging from to CAD275 to CAD1 000 to people not complying with the act.

Travellers without symptoms must quarantine (self-isolate). They must go directly to the place of quarantine without delay and stay there for 14 days. They may use public or private transportation, without making unnecessary stops and must practice physical (social) distancing at all times. At the place of quarantine, they must stay inside and not leave for 14 days, unless they need to seek medical attention; they must stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom from others, if possible. Visitors are not allowed; provision of essential supplies (grocery and medication) must be arranged.

Travellers with symptoms must isolate. They must go directly to the place of isolation without delay and stay there for 14 days. They must use private transportation only. Travellers must wear an appropriate mask or facial covering while in transit and avoid contact with others, remaining in their vehicle as much as possible; and staying at a hotel is not permitted. Travellers should not have contact with vulnerable people (65 years or older, or with underlying medical conditions). The location of the quarantine must be a suitable place of isolation that provides the necessities of life. In self-isolation, people must practice physical distancing at all times.

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Travel within Canada

As of 30 March 2020, all passengers flying within Canada have been subject to a health check prior to boarding. Travellers will not be permitted to board if they show any symptoms of Covid-19 infection, have been refused boarding in the past 14 days due to a medical reason related to Covid-19, or are subject to a provincial or local public health order. People showing symptoms of Covid-19 infection will not be allowed to board any flight, including connecting flights, before 14 days have passed, unless they present a medical certificate confirming that the symptoms are not related to Covid-19. People with symptoms consistent with Covid-19 must use private transportation to travel to the place where they will isolate.

Measures taken by provinces and territories

Canada is a federal state composed of ten provinces – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Newfoundland and Labrador – and three territories – Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut. Public health crisis management is governed at the provincial and territorial levels by Public Health Acts (or their equivalent).
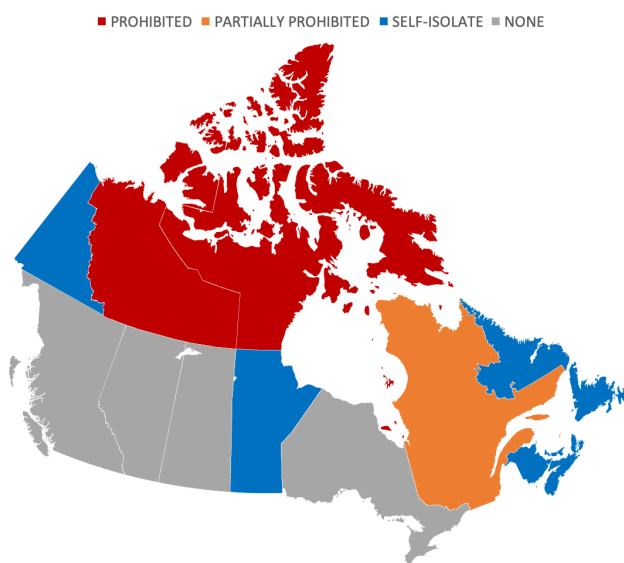
Quebec is the Canadian province most affected by the coronavirus crisis, Montreal and Laval experiencing the largest number of cases. The provincial government did not impose a general prohibition on travel, although it advised people to avoid all non-essential travel. Nevertheless, access to 19 areas is prohibited, unless for essential reasons or work; checkpoints have been deployed around these areas. Prohibited areas include, among others, Ville de Gatineau, Quebec's fourth-largest town, facing the capital Ottawa, and the far northern region of Nunavik, which is in a lockdown assisted by the Canadian Armed Forces.

Four provinces have imposed neither inter- nor intra-province travel restrictions in addition to those enacted by the national Government, namely Alberta, British Colombia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan (which recommended self-monitoring).

Five provinces require all people to self-isolate for 14 days, except for essential service workers and flight crews: Prince Edward Island ('anyone coming into Prince Edward Island must self-isolate for 14 days following all out of province travel, including within Canada and the US'), Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia (self-isolation rules), New Brunswick (self-isolation rules), Manitoba (travel information and self-isolation rules and checkpoints at highways and airports to inform travellers).

Three territories have implemented more stringent rules. Yukon advises against non-essential travel and requires travellers entering the territory to observe self-quarantine. Checkpoints are present at borders, and anyone entering Yukon will need to check in with an enforcement officer and fill out an information card that may be verified at any time during their stay.

Northwest Territories (NWT) has prohibited all incoming travel – both by air and road, with a few exemptions, such as residents, import/export and supply chain transportation workers, flight crew members, and essential services workers.

Nunavut introduced an entry ban for all travellers except for certain categories such as residents and essential workers. All residents returning must self-quarantine before entering the territory.

Figure 1: Travel restrictions inside Canada

PROHIBITED PARTIALLY PROHIBITED SELF-ISOLATE NONE

Source: EPRS.