

LATEST UPDATE – September 15th, 2020

In an effort to keep our community partners connected, we are providing you with regular COVID-19 updates.

Ministry of Health update

On Tuesday September 15, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, announced 97 new cases of COVID-19 in the province, for a total of 7,376 new cases in British Columbia. Of the total COVID-19 cases, 63 individuals are hospitalized, 20 of them in critical care or ICU. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been 2,608 cases of COVID-19 in the Vancouver Coastal Health region. More than three thousand people are currently being monitored because they are close contacts of those with COVID-19.

Transforming primary care in BC

The Province of BC has announced 22 new primary care networks in the province, for a total of 12 primary care networks in Vancouver Coastal Health. Government will provide approximately \$110 million in annual funding to the primary care networks once they are fully established. The team of health-care providers will include family physicians, nurse practitioners and health-care professionals, ranging from registered nurses, traditional wellness co-ordinators and cultural safety facilitators to allied health-care professionals, social workers and clinical pharmacists. For people and families, it means getting faster, better access to their primary care team or provider, including evenings and weekends, as well as being connected to appropriate services and supports in the community.

These new networks will see community partners, local health-care providers and Indigenous partners work together to ensure patients have access to a full range of team-based primary care services, from maternity to end of life, for all of their day-to-day health-care needs. Over the next years, these new networks are expected to help connect approximately 300,000 people to a local primary care team or provider, while providing team-based and culturally safe care to B.C. residents.

BC launches lung cancer screening program

The British Columbians at high risk of lung cancer will soon be able to receive early detection screening, thanks to a new lung cancer screening program offered by BC Cancer – the first of its kind in Canada. The target population for this new cancer screening program will be adults aged 55 to 74 who smoke or have a heavy smoking history. It's expected the first participants could be receiving scans by spring 2022. It is anticipated approximately 300 people will be diagnosed each year through the program and because they are diagnosed earlier, they will have more treatment options. Six British Columbians die of lung cancer each day.

- Lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death in Canada and worldwide.
- Lung cancer is the third most-common cancer in males and the second most-common cancer in females.
- Lung cancer primarily affects people aged 50 years and older.
- 70% of all lung cancers are currently diagnosed at an advanced stage, and when symptoms are already present.

Wildfire smoke

Exposure to air pollution can irritate the lungs, cause inflammation, and alter immune function, making it more difficult to fight respiratory infections such as COVID-19. When conditions are smoky, more people who are exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus may develop COVID-19 and some cases of COVID-19 may become more severe. Exposure to wildfire smoke and COVID-19 can both cause respiratory symptoms such as a dry cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing. Anyone experiencing severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, or chest pain should seek prompt medical attention by calling 9-1-1 or going to the nearest emergency department. If you are experiencing mild symptoms, use the BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool to help determine whether you need further assessment or testing for COVID-19. If you still have questions after using the self-assessment tool, contact your healthcare provider or call 8-1-1 for further guidance.

The wildfire smoke is coming from fires in Washington and Oregon. The forecast indicates slight improvement but ground-level smoke will remain, possibly until later this week. Localized smoke concentrations may vary widely across the region as winds and temperatures change, and as wildfire behaviour changes.

Testing

Anyone in the VCH region with cold, influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms, however mild, can now be assessed for and get a COVID-19 test. Contact your physician or nurse practitioner's office, or a local community collection centre to arrange for a test. Phone numbers and locations of collection centre can be found by visiting: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing> or by calling 8-1-1.

To protect yourself while out in public, wash your hands frequently and maintain social distance. For more information on COVID-19, please visit www.vch.ca/COVID19. For more information and latest updates on COVID-19, follow the BC Centre for Disease Control on Twitter @CDCofBC or visit the website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>.