

## LATEST UPDATE – Dec. 17, 2020

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

### Ministry of Health Update

In today's media availability on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, reported a total of 673 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours. The total number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in B.C. now stands at 44,776 since the start of the pandemic. There were 145 new cases reported in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region in the last day. There are 10,009 active cases of COVID-19 across B.C. currently.

Across the province, 21 new deaths were confirmed, while 358 people are currently hospitalized, with 93 of these cases receiving treatment in ICU/critical care. The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 now stands at 713. No new healthcare outbreaks were announced today. Currently, there are 55 active outbreaks in long-term care and assisted living and six in acute care units. Two new community outbreaks were announced, one in a poultry processing site, and the other among Diversified Transportation employees connected to LNG Canada.

Next Wednesday, modelling data will be presented as part of the COVID-19 briefing. This will explain where we are at with the pandemic and projections for coming weeks and months.

### Dr. Bonnie Henry Briefing Vaccine Update

1,215 healthcare workers have now been vaccinated- Dr. Henry recognized the work of public health and frontline workers in making this possible. They are expecting consistent weekly vaccine deliveries starting next week, with plans to expand vaccination sites to every health authority by early next week.

Dr. Henry emphasized that for some people who are immunocompromised or with underlying health conditions, including chronic liver or kidney disease, those on chemotherapy and others, they may not respond as well to certain vaccines. She advised people with any questions to speak to their healthcare provider. Not enough data is available from clinical trial evidence on how safe and effective they may be among those who are immunocompromised. However, as more data becomes available, individuals may connect with their healthcare provider on a one-on-one basis to determine the benefits and risks associated with receiving the vaccine.

### Testing Criteria Updates

The BCCDC will change its testing strategy to optimize towards those who most need it immediately. The majority of cases are connected to confirmed cases, or are part of a cluster of cases. COVID-19 symptoms are similar to other respiratory conditions, including influenza. However, four symptoms are very much associated with COVID-19 according to existing data- fever/chills, cough, difficulty breathing and loss of sense of taste and smell. **If you have any of these symptoms, you need to get tested straight away as a priority**, even if you've not been in contact with someone with COVID-19.

However, other symptoms on their own may not necessarily mean you have the virus- these include sore throat, loss of appetite, body aches, headache, nausea and diarrhea. If you have two or more of these symptoms, you can wait and see how your symptoms progress, or you can get tested if you wish. If you wait and decide to monitor your symptoms, if symptoms persist beyond 24 hours, you can then access testing services.

However, there are certain scenarios where public health advises asymptomatic individuals to get tested, including during LTC outbreaks- so this new testing criteria may not apply in certain environments. Dr. Henry urged anyone with concerns to speak to their healthcare provider or to call 811.

### Funding Announced for Opioid Overdose Response Programs

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions announced \$1.3 million in funding for grants to support people living in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in response to the ongoing opioid overdose crisis. Geographic remoteness may mean people need to travel longer distances to connect with health care and treatment, and access to Naloxone and harm-reduction services can be limited in areas with low populations.

The crisis has been particularly challenging for Indigenous communities and First Nations people. Eligible applicants can apply for up to \$50,000 in one-time-only funding. **All applications must be submitted by Jan. 22, 2021.** For further information, visit: <https://caibc.ca/rural-remote-indigenous-overdose-grants>.

### Saline Gargle Test- Arriving Prepared at COVID-19 Test Collection Sites

Since Nov. 16, all residents in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region are offered two options for COVID-19 test collection: either saline gargle or nasopharyngeal swab when they visit certain COVID-19 test collection sites. However, test collectors are reporting some recipients arrive unprepared for the saline gargle test collection, excluding this as a viable testing option. We advise members of the public who wish to use the COVID-19 saline gargle device to avoid eating, drinking, vaping or smoking, brushing their teeth or chewing gum for at least one hour prior to taking this test. To properly complete the gargle test collection, recipients must swish and gargle saline water in their mouth for 30 seconds under the supervision of a test administrator. Saline gargle collection is currently available at 14 test collection sites across urban and rural VCH communities, and accounts for just over 30% of all COVID-19 tests performed in the region. See further details below about where you can receive a COVID-19 test, if required.

### Share the Light

It has been ten months since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. We're deep in the second wave; COVID-19 case numbers and restrictions are rising. At Vancouver Coastal Health and in our community, COVID-19 fatigue is setting in. And yet there are glimmers of light all around us – like news of the first COVID-19 vaccine being delivered and the acts of kindness and support we see amongst health care workers and in our community. Together with Rory Richards – the Vancouver resident who started the 7 p.m. cheer – we have come up with an idea to winterize the 7 p.m. cheer and spread light with our family, core bubble, neighbours and greater community.

We would like to invite you to share *your* light. At 7 p.m. tonight and every night this winter, head to your window, point your flashlight, iPhone light, etc. (but not a laser) up into the night sky and wave it around. Create a light show for your family and your neighbours and encourage them to do the same by sharing on social media using #ShareTheLightBC.

Let's fill the night sky with beams and flickers of light, reminding us all that we are all in this pandemic together and that brighter days are ahead of us.

### VCH Website and Translation Engagement

VCH has started two important projects – the redesign of the VCH website and a review of VCH translation practices. Your input in the web design project and the translation needs at VCH for safe care will help us improve our translation tools and ensure our future website is a user-friendly resource that is easy to navigate. We are hosting Zoom focus groups to hear from the diverse communities we serve. To register for our upcoming focus group times and dates, please email [ce@vch.ca](mailto:ce@vch.ca).

### 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 centres can be found by visiting: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing> or by calling 8-1-1. 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/>.

### Other Resources

To find the Provincial Health Officer's orders, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

To see a map of **COVID-19 cases by local health area**, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/data>

For a listing of the **community exposure events**, go to: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/public-exposures>

For the **latest medical updates**, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>

For **community engagement opportunities** at VCH, see: <http://cean.vch.ca/members/current-opportunities/>