

LATEST UPDATE – Feb. 8, 2021

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

Ministry of Health Update

In Friday's joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, reported 471 new cases. The total number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in B.C. now stands at 69,716 since the start of the pandemic. Of the new cases, 108 people were in the Vancouver Coastal Health region.

Across the province, there have been six new COVID-19 related deaths, while 253 people are currently hospitalized, with 70 of these cases receiving treatment in ICU/critical care. The total number of individuals who have passed away due to COVID-19 is 1,246. There are now 4,423 active cases of COVID-19 across B.C. currently.

Since the start of immunizations, 149,564 vaccinations have been delivered in B.C. (not including today), with 10,366 of those being a second dose. More information and immunization data is available through this page: [BCCDC](#)

COVID-19 Modeling and Orders

Dr. Henry said she is keeping the current orders and restrictions on social gatherings and events in place to help us buy time until there is a better understanding of the variants and the vaccination program is on track. The current orders will be continually reviewed with a target set for the end of the month in the hopes of easing restrictions if things are going well. This could include return to the "safe six", opening faith services and re-starting sports programs.

While reviewing the epidemiology models, Dr. Bonnie Henry says it is significant we have plateaued in terms of newly-identified COVID-19 cases and that we are slowly reducing transmission. The models show we are generally doing the right things to minimize transmission. The majority of those infected are not spreading the virus to others and the reproduction number in B.C. is below 1 right now. We have also seen a dramatic decrease of severe disease in our elders since the introduction of the vaccine. The modeling, which can be found [here](#), tells us we are seeing encouraging signs in B.C.

Dr. Henry expressed concerns around the emergence of COVID-19 variants, which could cause cases to surge with an increase in social interactions. About 4,500 cases have been sequenced, identifying either the UK or the South African variant in 28 cases. Of the variant first identified in the UK, 14 cases relate to people who have traveled or were a close contact of those who have traveled.

Of concern is the eight cases of the variant first detected in South Africa. In five of the cases, it is not known where the virus was acquired. Dr. Henry noted that we're not seeing widespread variants in B.C. yet, but in order to have a better sense of where the province is, general and targeted surveillance is being stepped up. She said one or two super-spreader events can lead to a rapid spread of cases in B.C.

Enhanced safety measures for schools

The Province has introduced enhanced safety measures as it continues to strengthen health and safety plans in K-12 schools to keep students, teachers and staff safe during the pandemic. All middle and secondary students and K-12 staff will now be required to wear non-medical masks in all indoor areas, including when they are with their learning groups. The only exceptions are when:

- sitting or standing at their seat or workstation in a classroom;
- there is a barrier in place; or
- they are eating or drinking.

Prior to these changes, masks were required for middle and secondary students and all K-12 staff in high-traffic areas, like hallways and outside of classrooms or learning groups when they could not safely distance from others. For elementary students, wearing masks indoors remain a personal choice. Guidelines have also been strengthened for physical education and music classes.

Funding has also been allocated for six regional rapid response teams, one for each health authority and one dedicated to support independent schools, with representatives from both school and provincial health staff. These teams, announced by the provincial health officer, will continue to improve the speed of school exposure investigations, so health authorities can inform school districts and families more quickly. If there has been a significant exposure event or an in-school transmission, rapid response teams will be deployed to conduct a review and make recommendations, if needed.

To support daily screening, a new K-12 health-checker app has been developed for students and their families and can be found at: <https://www.k12dailycheck.gov.bc.ca>. The app will allow people to answer simple questions every day. It will inform them if they can attend school or if they need to self-isolate and contact 811 to be screened for COVID-19. More information on the announcement can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 in Whistler

All Whistler residents and potential visitors are asked to sustain their ongoing efforts to remain safe and to prevent community transmission of COVID-19. Public Health continues to identify a higher than average number of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 in this community.

From Jan. 26 to Feb. 2, VCH recorded 259 cases in Whistler. This is a total of 547 cases in Whistler from Jan. 1 to Feb. 2. The majority of cases continue to be identified in young people in their 20s and 30s who live, work and socialize together. To date, two of the cases have required brief hospitalization and no deaths have occurred. Almost all of the recent cases are associated with transmission occurring within households and social settings. Whistler experienced a similar increase in cases in November 2020, which resolved in early December.

According to contact tracing investigations, very little transmission has been linked to outdoor recreation areas such as Whistler and Blackcomb mountains.

VCH continues to strongly advise Whistler residents and potential visitors to follow Public Health guidance, including:

- Keep to your household bubbles and avoid social gatherings.
- Avoid all non-essential travel; visit your local mountains for winter and recreational activities.
- Stay home if you have any symptoms, however mild, and get tested if your symptoms are consistent with COVID-19.
- Practise physical distancing and wear a mask, if possible, if you cannot.
- Wash your hands often.

VCH remains grateful to Whistler community leaders for their ongoing support since the start of the pandemic. VCH is committed to ensuring prompt support and care for anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 in the Whistler community. Please click [here](#) for more information.

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/>