

## Questions and Answers from Norm Letnick Town Hall

### New questions and answers:

Donations – ( Source: <https://news.interiorhealth.ca/news/thanks-for-your-support/>)

**With the shortage of masks and some of the other Personal Protective Gear we are hearing about is it possible for clubs or businesses to make donations to help doctors, patients, at home care providers or clinics?**

Interior Health appreciates the passion and commitment of our communities wanting to help healthcare providers and patients through non-cash donations and supply offers.

We are overwhelmed by the generosity of our communities and offers of homemade surgical masks, cookies or other food products. Due to our strict safety standards and to minimize risks to our health-care staff, we are unable to accept those offers at this time.

To ensure that any non-cash donations, personal protective equipment (PPE), medical supplies, and any other donations meet safety and infection control standards and are appropriate for our care environment, please direct public and local community offers to the following links:

- [Donate Personal Protective Equipment and Medical Supplies](#)
- [Donate Non-Medical Products or Services](#)

Suppliers and producers of medical and PPE supplies should visit the province's [COVID-19 Supply Hub](#) website.

### **Vulnerable populations (Source: MMHA key messages, reviewed by IH MMHSU team)**

**What is Interior Health doing for our most vulnerable citizens during the COVID-19 crisis, those who are experiencing homelessness or are in need of substance use or mental health support?**

There have been several steps taken at the provincial and local levels to help protect vulnerable populations including people who are experiencing homelessness or substance use disorders.

On March 26, the Province released new guidelines for health-care providers to support patients living with substance use disorders safe in the midst of two public health emergencies – the overdose crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. These new prescribing guidelines will make it possible for people with substance use challenges to practice the physical distancing and self-isolation that we all are required to do.

In some communities, harm reduction supplies are being delivered pre-packaged to people who need them.

Some mental health and substance use service providers have moved to a mobile model – meeting clients where they are at - to ensure people have the supports, harm reduction and sanitization supplies they need to stay safe.

### **What is the difference between advice to quarantine for 14 days and to self-isolate for 10 days?**

As of March 25, 2020, all persons arriving in Canada must self-isolate (quarantine) and monitor for symptoms for 14 days under the Quarantine Act.

With or without a history of travel or a known exposure to someone with COVID-19, if you have respiratory symptoms that can be managed at home, self-isolate at home for at least 10 days from the start of any symptoms. If after 10 days, you feel better, your symptoms have improved AND you have had no fever for 72 hours, whichever is later, you may return to regular activities. Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean you need to continue to isolate for more than 10 days.

It is important to know that individuals experience symptoms differently, and consulting with a health professional is recommended.

Here are some examples:

**Example 1:** Your fever stops on day 10 of isolation and your symptoms have improved. You must wait for 72 hours after your temperature is normal before ending isolation. The soonest would be at the same time on day 13 as when your fever stopped on day 10.

**Example 2:** Your fever stopped on day 9 and your symptoms have improved. You need to wait until day 12 to end isolating.

**Example 3:** You only had fever at the start and symptoms which have gone: you can stop isolating after day 10.

### **Is it safe to be in the yard of a multi-family property shared with others? How safe are common areas ie. Shared laundry?**

The same precautions should be followed as if you lived in a multi-unit building: use common amenities like laundry only when other neighbours are not present in the room. Clean surfaces in common areas using regular household cleaners. For more information, see BCCDC's [Tips for residents of apartments and multi-unit buildings](#).

## **Previous Questions and answers**

### **Symptoms**

#### **Can people without symptoms spread COVID-19?**

It is possible that people infected with COVID-19 may be infectious before showing significant symptoms, however based on currently available data, the people who have symptoms are causing the

majority of the virus spread. Most people became ill from being in close contact with someone who showed symptoms such as coughing and sneezing, therefore transmitting the virus through droplets.

### **Why are people who are returning from travel abroad required to self-isolate even if they don't have symptoms?**

People can be infected with the COVID-19 virus and it may take up to two weeks before they show any symptoms. Those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms and can spread the disease to other people during this time. That's why it's critical everyone who has been travelling self-isolate for the two week period, to ensure they do not have the virus and do not spread it.

### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

All people in British Columbia should be on high alert and self-monitoring for symptoms. Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should immediately self-isolate for 14 days and limit contact with others. Symptoms of COVID-19 may be mild or severe. Mild symptoms may include some of all of the following: Low-grade fever, cough, malaise, fatigue, heavy mucus, sore throat as well as gastro-intestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea. More severe symptoms may include any of the above as well as fever, shortness of breathing, difficulty breathing and or chest pains.

### **Testing**

**After speaking with a Nurse Practitioner her main concern was that we are not completing enough testing, in fact she needed to get approval to test me, a patient with a viral pneumonia.**

Testing is not needed for everyone. If people have symptoms, they should contact their primary care provider (call first) or dial 8-1-1. If you feel like you have symptoms or are sick, you need to self-isolate for 14 days. Testing guidelines from the BCCDC limit testing to people with symptoms who are:

1. Hospitalized or are likely to be hospitalized
2. Health-care workers
3. Residents of long term care facilities
4. Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak

**When are we going to start testing symptomatic people to control the spread? When are we going to test everyone, since asymptomatic people are a major concern for people spreading the virus unknowingly? Should we have everyone wear a mask to help prevent the spread as asymptomatic people could be a major issue of the spread of the virus since we aren't testing?**

Testing is not needed for everyone, although everyone who needs a test will get it. Testing is happening by referral only. There is not a drop-in testing service – if people have symptoms, they should contact their primary care provider (call first) or dial 8-1-1.

To support testing of people who meet specific criteria, testing guidelines from the BCCDC limit testing to people with symptoms who are:

1. Hospitalized or are likely to be hospitalized
2. Health-care workers
3. Residents of long term care facilities
4. Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak

Patients without symptoms, or those with mild symptoms, who can be managed at home, should not be tested. The exception is health-care workers with COVID-19 infection who have recovered and require a negative test prior to returning to work.

Check out the [BCCDC symptom self-assessment tool](#) for help determining if you might need further assessment or testing for COVID-19.

Everyone should not wear a mask as that would be a waste of critical supplies. Masks need to be utilized by health-care workers to ensure they are safe. The best way for everyone to stay safe is to listen to the recommendations of Dr. Bonnie Henry and practice physical distancing, staying two metres away from other people and staying home as much as possible.

### **When are we going to speed up the process for COVID testing results? Mine took 6 days**

When the outbreak began, Interior Health had to send test samples to the BC Centre for Disease Control so the turnaround time could take a few days, depending on how many tests the BCCDC was handling. Now that we have a test lab set up at Kelowna General Hospital and we are able to do the testing at KGH, we have a very rapid turnaround time, sometimes as quick as 24 hours. If the patient is positive for COVID-19, a case management plan is set up very quickly.

### **Case locations**

### **Why is IH keeping the communities a secret? This is not fair to the communities, we have a right to know.**

Interior Health is following the guidelines as set out by Dr. Henry and Minister Dix. Because of patient privacy we cannot confirm individual cases, unless there is a pressing public health need to do so. We have to assume the virus is everywhere and the public needs to practice proper physical distancing techniques so that we can flatten the curve.

### **Are physicians required to self-isolate if they return from travel?**

Everyone is required to self-isolate upon their return from travel, except for health-care professionals like physicians. The Provincial Health Officer has said that healthcare professionals are an essential service and are needed in the fight against the COVID-19 virus. While they are working they will have to wear proper Personal Protective Equipment and they will have to abide by physical distancing regulations.

### **We are already seeing an early arrival of summer residents and vacationers to our large area. What plans are in place to handle a virus spread with increased population?**

The Provincial Health Officer has ordered many of the businesses where the virus could be spread to close and local authorities have already closed several public gathering spots such as parks and beaches. The Federal Government has taken steps to ban sick travellers from domestic flights and the border

between Canada and the USA is closed to non-essential traffic. Residents and vacationers will have to adhere to the physical distancing regulations put in place by the Provincial Health Officer. Provincial Health Officers in other provinces right across Canada have been giving similar direction to residents of Canada about physical distancing, hand hygiene and staying inside and isolating if they have symptoms.

**If a COVID-19 case is linked to an essential service, such as a grocery store, will the location be publicly released to trace spread?**

Public Service Announcements will be issued in situations where there is a need to advise the broader public of potential exposures in the community. The decision to issue a PSA is made on the advice of medical health officers.

**What is the risk of COVID-19 to newborns?**

There is currently no evidence of mother-to-child transmission through childbirth when the mother gets COVID-19 in the third trimester and no evidence to suggest a developing child could be negatively affected by COVID-19.

If you plan to give birth in a hospital or birth centre, learn about the policies they have in place. Most hospitals and birth centres have a reduced visitors or a no-visitor policy and in most cases, only one support person may be permitted.

We are still learning how COVID-19 affects pregnant women but at this point there is no evidence that suggests pregnant women are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.

Click [here](#) for more information.

**Physical distancing/Self Isolation**

**If you have been self-isolating for 14 days, and you're feeling fine, is it ok to go for a walk alone, as long as you maintain a distance of two metres between other people?**

Yes, you can go outside for a walk after your 14-day isolation period. It's important to maintain proper physical distancing at all times.

**Is it ok for a person who is symptomatic and self-isolating, to spend time with other family members in their homes?**

It is better if those you live with can stay somewhere else, especially if they have a weak immune system or chronic health conditions. If you need to share a home, stay and sleep in a room with good airflow that is away from others. Use a separate bathroom if you can. Wear a face mask (surgical/procedure mask) if you are in the same room with anyone. Avoid face to face contact; friends or family can drop off food outside your room or home. If you are a caregiver to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or has respiratory symptoms, [see this guide](#).

**I've heard awful stories from other parts of the world about the treatment of people with disabilities during this pandemic. What is the situation in Canada? Should people be worried if they are seniors or have disabilities that they will be denied care?**

No. We are providing treatment to patients based on their clinical need. Where patients have mild symptoms and are able to manage their illness at home, we are supporting them to recover in their home. Patients who require higher levels of care are receiving it through our hospitals.

### **Provincial response**

#### **Can B.C. make it mandatory for people to wash or sanitize their hands and wear masks before entering any businesses? This has worked in other countries to reduce spread.**

The Provincial Health Officer has said that the risk of transmission through handling cash is low.

However, customers and employees are encouraged to follow the direction of the PHO, including proper physical distancing, washing their hands frequently, and always before eating, after using the washroom, when they arrive to work, and when they arrive home.

Where possible, stores may also wish to move to card or contactless payment methods to further reduce the risk of transmission.

#### **Why isn't B.C. in a lockdown like other jurisdictions? Wouldn't extremely strict measures for three months be preferable to this carrying on for 12 months?**

A lockdown is what some parts of the world are calling the steps they're taking during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it means different things in different places.

Here in B.C., the Provincial Health Officer has issued a number of orders aimed at ensuring the safety of all British Columbians during the COVID-19 response.

This includes direction on staying at home when possible, physical distancing in the public, limits on size of gatherings, the shift to provide take-out and delivery service only at restaurants and bars and the curtailment of other services in which close proximity can take place between workers and customers.

To be clear, these are direct orders from the Public Health Officer – her orders were made to protect our most vulnerable, to protect our health-care system, and to protect our health care workers who are undertaking a tremendously difficult task. These orders are temporary measures that will have a positive long-term impact.

For those who have been given orders to self-isolate or for businesses which have been asked to close, it is your obligation, your responsibility to the community and all British Columbians. It is also an order. All British Columbians must abide by this direction. Peace officers can be enlisted to enforce these orders if required.

#### **Is there a tip-line for concerned members of the public to report when they are aware of businesses that are not following the orders of the PHO?**

The only businesses that have been ordered to close are personal care services, dine-in restaurant services, bars and nightclubs, and now also gyms and fitness centres as of April 2. Any business or service that has not been ordered to close, may stay open if it can adapt its services and workplace to the orders and recommendations of the Provincial Health Officer.

Employers have a responsibility and an obligation to provide workers with safe working conditions, as laid out in WorkSafeBC's Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines, and as stated by the Provincial Health Officer.

Local by-law officers are being redeployed to help ensure compliance with the Provincial Health Officer's orders and make sure they're enforced. If you are seeing a contravention of that order, you should contact your local bylaw enforcement to report it. This number can be found through your local government's website. We want to make sure bylaw officers can tackle the most serious risks so we ask the public to use their judgement and only contact bylaw officer when necessary.

**What should we do if we know of individuals who should be self-isolating, but who are continuing to go out in public?**

Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry advises that physical distancing is an important line of defence for all us. This is new for everyone, and we know these changes are difficult for people. It's important to remember that members of the same household do not have to practice physical distancing of 2 meters at home or in public, as long as they can maintain safe physical distance from others. We all need to take personal responsibility and make the right choices now to protect our most vulnerable and our health care workers.