

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Before we go any further, we just want to thank everyone in our community who is stepping up to help out and do their part to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you to all of you who have been doing your part by washing your hands, maintaining social distancing, and staying home when sick.

Thank you as well to everyone who is contributing in other ways: from checking in on homebound neighbours; to volunteering to deliver groceries; to creating extra grocery store hours for those of us at highest risk. It is amazing to see our incredible community coming together at a time like this and it will take all of us working together to get through this.

At the same time, we cannot become complacent about our efforts. As you have all seen in places like Italy, Spain and Iran, COVID-19 infections can escalate out of control and overwhelm the healthcare system very quickly once community spread is established.

While we have not identified any community spread on the lower Sunshine Coast, we can confirm that COVID-19 has been identified in rural communities in the Coastal Health region. We should assume that COVID-19 is on the Coast and act accordingly.

The more we can delay and slow the spread of COVID-19 on the Coast, the better chance that we will have of protecting our fellow Coasters, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

We cannot overstate the importance of taking basic precautionary measures such as hand washing, social distancing and self-isolation when you have symptoms. We have seen countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea have success in slowing down the spread of COVID-19 by taking aggressive voluntary community measures, and our geography and low population density give us a chance to implement similar measures effectively.

As noted above, there have been significant developments over the weekend and we would strongly encourage everyone on the Sunshine Coast to avoid any gatherings and to stay at home unless you have an acute medical problem, work or another essential reason to be out. This includes staying on the Coast and off the ferries.

We would also encourage everyone to use this opportunity to connect with family and to enjoy our beautiful outdoors while maintaining social distancing (with cautions around playgrounds and other shared spaces where risk of surface contamination is higher).

We also want to update everyone on a change in policy regarding assessment and screening for COVID-19 since yesterday's update. If you have mild to moderate symptoms of cough, fever, aches and pains, or runny nose, headaches or nausea, please self-isolate at home for fourteen days from the onset of symptoms. Please call the COVID hotline at 1-888-COVID19 or your doctor's office if you are unsure about what to do or concerned that you may require further assessment.

If you develop severe symptoms and think you may need hospitalization, please call 911 to arrange for safe transportation to the Sechelt Hospital Emergency Department or call ahead to Sechelt Hospital (604-885-2224) if you are able to transport yourself.

Please note that we are no longer swabbing suspected COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms and that you will only be swabbed if your symptoms are severe enough to require hospital admission, if you are a long term care resident with symptoms, or if you are a health care worker.

As this situation continues to evolve rapidly, please check the Coast Reporter website regularly for updates on COVID-19 in our community, and tune in daily for updates on Coast FM and Coast Cable.

Keep well, wash your hands, keep your distance, and stay at home if at all possible!

Sincerely,

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

-Dr Jennifer Baxter
-Dr Herman Mentz
-Dr Daren Spithoff

-Dr Ted Krickan
-Dr Brian Nelson