

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Thank you again to all of you who have been doing your part by staying home, washing your hands and practising social distancing. We have a very narrow window of time to try to contain COVID-19 before it becomes an overwhelming problem. Please continue to do your part to keep COVID-19 virus activity to a minimum on the Coast. This may be our best and only chance to protect our most vulnerable neighbours, friends and family.

As you are probably now aware, we do have confirmed travel-related COVID-19 cases on the lower Sunshine Coast. We were unable to confirm this previously due to Public Health policy.

We are happy to report that the affected patients are recovering well in self-isolation at home, but this does reflect the reality that COVID-19 is here and that we need to be taking every possible precaution to ensure that it is contained.

While we are not aware of any community spread of COVID-19 (meaning newly identified COVID-19 cases that are not related to travel and are not linked to any known COVID-19 cases), we should all be acting as though COVID-19 is here and spreading in our community.

We have heard reports of returning travellers and people with respiratory symptoms not following self-isolation protocols, and of numerous community members who are not taking precautions because they feel they are low risk. Please take the COVID-19 pandemic seriously, as the lives of our neighbours, friends and family are at stake.

Please do not leave your home unless you have an essential reason to do so (walks outside with appropriate social distancing are still encouraged). Essential reasons would include an acute medical concern that requires immediate medical care or you provide an essential service to the community. If you are an employer, please look at reducing your staff, reducing your hours, and reducing employee and client exposure to anyone who is potentially COVID positive.

Although there are currently no patients with COVID-19 admitted to Sechelt Hospital, we continue to prepare and plan for the potentially difficult situation we may be facing in a very short time. The more we can prevent infection and slow down the spread of the virus now, the better chance we will have of being able to help those who do get sick by preventing our local and regional health services from being overwhelmed.

If you should develop any upper respiratory tract symptoms that could represent COVID-19, please self-isolate immediately for 14 days from the onset of symptoms. As COVID-19 symptoms can be very mild for many people, please have a very low threshold for self-isolation. Even something as small as a new runny nose qualifies. Please note that anyone who is self-isolating is assumed to have COVID-19 and will no longer be swabbed.

If you need to self-isolate, you should arrange for other household members to stay elsewhere if possible. "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." (www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19)

These are extreme measures, but we are facing an extremely dangerous situation which has the potential to devastate our community and overwhelm our hospital and health care system.

If your day-to-day life has not been significantly impacted and restricted to date, then you are not doing enough to protect yourself or those around you. This may be our last chance to slow things down before they move past the point of no return, so please do everything you can to help us be in a position to help you.

If you believe that your symptoms are severe enough to warrant assessment by a physician, please call the BC COVID-19 hotline at 1-888-COVID19, or contact your local physicians' office. You can also use the new online self-assessment tool at <https://covid19.thrive.health>

If you feel you may need to be hospitalized for more severe symptoms, please call 911 if you require ambulance transport, or call ahead to Sechelt Hospital at 604-885-2224 so that the appropriate precautions can be made to protect healthcare workers and fellow patients.

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 at 6 p.m. and Eastlink Community TV at 5:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m. and 10 p.m.

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