

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Thank you again to all of you who continue to do your part by staying home, washing your hands and practicing social distancing. While it's hard to believe that something major is happening with the beautiful weather outside and no active COVID-19 patients in the hospital, a quick glance at the news from other places around the world shows us where we might be in a very short time if we don't take the appropriate precautions.

We are in the middle of a once-in-a-lifetime event that will be with us for the rest of our lives. Right now is our chance to change the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic in our community; right now, before we have an unmanageable situation on our hands. If you have ever wanted to save someone's life, this is the best opportunity you are ever going to have. Best. Opportunity. Ever.

It seems ironic that your best superhero power is to stay at home, but in the case of a pandemic like the one we are facing, staying home is the very best thing that you can do. Please don't go out in public unless absolutely necessary, and when we say necessary, we mean absolutely necessary, like a medical emergency that might require hospitalization. Wash your hands like someone's life depended on it; someone's life does depend on it. Don't touch your face unless you have just thoroughly washed your hands. And practise social distancing, even if it feels weird or awkward or an over the top thing to do. If we all do this, we'll be able to look each other in the eye at the end of this and say we did everything we could to help our family, friends and neighbours.

With respect to staying home, we wrote yesterday about the online and phone ordering options available at most, if not all of our grocery stores. Please use these options whenever possible, and make use of the resources that we have in our community to arrange delivery whenever possible. The less we are in shared public spaces together, the greater chance we have of preventing COVID-19 from spreading through our community.

If you do have to be in a public place, make sure that you maintain adequate social distancing - at least six feet between you and the next person. If you are a business owner running an essential business, please help us enforce social distancing by limiting the number of people in your premises at any given time, by posting signs, and by doing periodic announcements to remind people to maintain their spacing. Consider creating a booking system whereby customers sign up to come in at a set time. Even better, set up online or phone in orders and arrange for pick-up or delivery.

Social distancing also applies when you are out for a walk in the neighbourhood, or on the beach, or in the forest. Protect yourself and those around you by maintaining adequate distance between yourself and everyone else. Help hold each other accountable: gently remind people to maintain space; wear a T-shirt that says 'If you're reading this, you're too close'; encourage social distancing on FaceBook, email and when you're talking to friends on the phone. Every little bit counts.

Given the way that COVID-19 has spread in other communities around the world, we anticipate that the Sunshine Coast will soon be seeing evidence of community spread (meaning newly identified COVID-19 cases that are not related to travel and are not linked to any known COVID-19 cases). If this happens, please remember that this is not a reflection of the effectiveness of social distancing, as these are people who were infected one to two weeks ago. We will find out whether our current measures are being effective in the next few weeks after our first bump in COVID-19 cases. Hopefully we can flatten the curve!

It is important to bear in mind that many of us will likely become infected with COVID-19 over the coming months. If it all happens at once, then we are in trouble. If we can slow down the rate of infection by taking the aggressive measures above, then we buy ourselves time; time to develop effective treatment; time to develop a vaccine; time to allow our healthcare system to help everyone who can be helped.

This is unlikely to be a quick process. If we are successful in slowing down COVID-19, it may be months of restrictions. While this will be hard on all of us, months of restrictions will actually indicate that our efforts have been successful, because we will have slowed down the virus and saved lives. It is vitally important that we all work together on this, if we want to avoid what is happening in Italy and Spain right now.

While the vast majority of people who contract COVID-19 will experience mild symptoms and recover fully, there will be some people who will experience severe symptoms and require hospitalization or even life support. People who are over 65 or have health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, emphysema, heart failure, coronary artery disease, renal failure, and/or other significant health conditions are at highest risk for developing severe disease. Please make sure that you talk to your loved ones and to your family doctor about advanced directives, and make sure that your wishes are clearly documented.

If you should develop any cold or flu type 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 we are no longer swabbing people unless they are hospitalized.

If you need to self-isolate, please visit the [BCCDC website](#) for instructions on how to do this properly.

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 online self-assessment tool at [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.

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.

Sincerely,

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

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

-Dr Ted Krickan
-Dr Brian Nelson