

COVID-19: Updated Guidance for Physicians and Patients

Situation Update:

On March 11th, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic with more than 118,000 cases identified in 114 countries. To date, 46 cases have been identified in BC. In VCH, our initial four VCH cases have since recovered. Nine cases are connected to a contracted long-term care facility, Lynn Valley Care Centre (Lodge) in North Vancouver with one associated death in an elderly resident. The facility has been placed under outbreak control measures to prevent further spread and Vancouver Coastal Health continues to manage the outbreak and provide support to staff, residents and their families. On March 11, a second COVID-19 outbreak was declared at Hollyburn House Long Term Care Facility in West Vancouver, which has a direct connection to the outbreak at Lynn Valley Care Centre Lodge.

While we are still investigating the possibility of community transmission associated with the long-term care facility cases, we do not currently have evidence of ongoing risk to the broader community. The majority of new cases continue to be associated with travel exposure. The overall risk to British Columbians remains low at this time.

In order to support preparedness activities throughout the region, VCH has initiated Emergency Operations Committees in each Community of Care. These committees will help facilitate planning and communication for VCH facilities, with representation from leadership at all local VCH sites.

Testing Recommendations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patients with compatible symptoms (e.g. fever, cough or difficulty breathing) AND 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel within 14 days of symptom onset to an affected area 	OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AND no clear alternative diagnosis 		

Clinicians may order a test for other exposures based on clinical judgement. To inform your risk assessment, the WHO provides daily updates to the list of affected areas in their COVID-19 [Situation Report](#). VCH Public Health will rapidly follow up on any positive results and Medical Health Officers remain available for physician consultation. Please note that all tests for influenza which result negative will now be subsequently tested for COVID-19.

Please advise the patient being tested specifically for COVID-19 to self-isolate until they receive a negative test result (See patient handout on page 2). **Patients may access their test results by calling the BC Centre for Disease Control COVID results hotline at 1-833-707-2792** (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm).

For all patients tested:

- Offer them a surgical mask and place them in a separate room.
- When obtaining a swab, ensure that you wear a surgical mask and eye protection.
- Obtain a nasopharyngeal swab with a red-topped, or throat swab with a blue-topped COPAN swab with UTM.
- Send samples to the laboratory and ensure that the requisition indicates testing for “novel coronavirus”.

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 Toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

Vancouver: Dr. John Harding, Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900

Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3170 | North Shore: Dr. Mark Lysyshyn 604.983.6701 | Coastal Rural: Dr. Geoff McKee 604.983.6701

To receive Physicians' Updates by email please contact us at: <mailto:VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca>

Discharge planning:

- If the patient is well enough to return home, discharge the patient with a surgical mask and advise the patient to isolate at home until they receive a test result. Please give the patient the information on self-isolation and results hotline phone number on the next page.
- If results are positive, VCH Public Health will be notified immediately and will follow up directly with the patient and any contacts

Community-based physician offices:

We encourage community-based physician offices to develop the capacity to assess and test for COVID-19 as your role is valuable in identifying cases in the community and reducing the burden on acute care. We recognize that this may lead to concerns about your health and that of your staff and patients. We want to reassure you that community-based physicians can safely assess and test patients for COVID-19 with appropriate infection control precautions in place. The following tips for community-based physician offices have been adapted from a recent BC College of Physicians and Surgeons letter:

- Offer patients being seen for respiratory infection, including COVID-19, a surgical/procedural mask or tissues to cover their mouth and nose when they enter the clinic area. This greatly reduces the risk of any transmission.
- Have alcohol-based hand rubs (60-90% alcohol) available at the clinic entrance, the reception counter, and near exam room doors.
- When collecting nasopharyngeal or throat swabs for COVID-19 testing, we advise the use of a surgical mask and eye protection for the person performing the swab only.
- The use of routine cleaning products is sufficient to disinfect exam rooms and any other high-touch surfaces. Use of specialized disinfection products is not necessary.
- Administrative staff do not need to wear masks or other personal protective equipment unless they are involved in direct care of the patient, while the patient is not masked.

While we encourage community-based physicians to develop capacity for testing at their clinics, we realize that not all clinics are yet equipped to meet all infection control recommendations. If clinics do not have access to the recommended personal protective equipment, we recommend assessing then referring the patient to the nearest Urgent Primary Care Centre. In rural areas, the emergency department may be the only alternative. VCH is not currently equipped to provide community-based physician clinics with personal protective equipment or other supplies; however, some communities have worked with their local Division of Family Practice to assist with procurement.

Additional Information:

We understand there is a need for information beyond testing and infection control, as physicians play an important role in informing the community around health issues. Medical Health Officers are also providing guidance to School Districts, Local Governments, and other community-based institutions. Additional resources, such as information for the general public and recommendations for specific scenarios, are actively being developed and will be posted on the [VCH website](#). Additional Infection Control resources can be found at VCH Infection Prevention and Control

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Information for patients being tested for novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and cared for in the community

Your doctor has determined that you can safely be cared for at home. To prevent the spread of contagious respiratory illnesses including novel coronavirus, we advise that you **self-isolate at home** until your test results are complete.

Your coronavirus test results will be available within the next 2-3 days. You may call the BC Centre for Disease Control Results Hotline for your test results at 1-833-707-2792 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm)

Instructions for self-isolation:

- 1) Stay home while you are sick** – Just as when you have the flu, you should stay home when you are sick. Do not go to work, or school. Cancel non-urgent appointments. However, you can still leave home for essential purchases, such as getting groceries. If you do go out while you are still sick, it is best if you wear a mask (see point #2 below). Your doctor may provide you with a note excusing you from work or school.
- 2) Wear a face mask** – Wear a face mask when you are in the same room with other people and when you visit a health care facility. If your mask gets wet or dirty, change it. Please note: A face mask refers to a surgical/procedure mask. N95 respirator masks are not required by the patient or household contacts.
- 3) Separate yourself from other people in your home** – Stay and sleep in a well-ventilated room separate from other people. Use a separate bathroom if available. Use a face mask in shared spaces. Household members should stay in another home or place of residence if possible. Restrict visitors. However, it is ok to have friends/family drop off food or you can use delivery/pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.
- 4) Do not prepare food for others in your household**
- 5) Avoid sharing household items** - Do not share dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with people in your home. After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water.
- 6) Cover your coughs and sneezes** – Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough/sneeze, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve instead of your hand. Throw used tissues into a lined trash can in your room before disposal with other household waste. Immediately wash your hands.
- 7) Wash your hands** – Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use disposable paper towels when possible. For more information on handwashing see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing>. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based sanitizer, however, always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- 8) Flush toilet with the lid down** – the virus may also be present in stool.
- 9) Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces** – Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g. counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables) once per day with regular household disinfectant or a solution containing 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
- 10) Notify health care facilities before you visit** – Call ahead before visiting a health care facility, and advise them that you have or are being tested for novel coronavirus. Also be sure to inform health care providers when you arrive. This will help health care facilities to take steps to keep other people from becoming infected.
- 11) Monitor your symptoms** – Seek medical attention if you have trouble breathing, are unable to tolerate fluids, or if your illness is worsening. Notify health care facilities and health care providers (e.g. emergency departments, ambulance paramedics, doctor's offices) before you visit.