

Press Release from the Physicians of Cowichan

We know that you in the community are quite rightly concerned and anxious about COVID-19. Cowichan physicians have organized themselves to respond to the situation as it evolves and to provide you with timely and accurate information regarding the novel COVID-19 pandemic currently upon our doorstep. Our goal is to provide information and direction so you may understand your own responsibilities as a member of our community and the greater population during this worldwide outbreak. The Province's team of public health specialists, the Medical Health Officers are working hard to support family physicians to have the information that is needed to respond to this pandemic.

We want to send out a clear message to you about how local Family Doctor healthcare is changing and explain how you can help our community fare as best it can through what will be a difficult time.

We understand many people are frustrated that the Provincial Health Officer and Island Health have not provided specific locations of confirmed cases. We know that the Coronavirus is in several communities on Vancouver Island and as a result we need **everyone** to be taking measures to prevent transmission. Even people with very mild symptoms may pass on this virus. It doesn't serve anyone to think it's not in my community and won't affect me. The precautions are for **everybody** in **every community**. The message is clear: for anyone who has not taken the calls to action seriously, it is not too late. You are being asked to take seriously your responsibility to your community and your loved ones.

Our plan to avoid this situation is to ensure everyone knows that social distancing is important. **THIS APPLIES TO EVERYONE**. Social distancing is currently seen as the main way to limit the spread of COVID-19. It requires YOU and everyone, to aggressively limit unnecessary direct contact you have with other people. This includes avoiding groups, crowded places and places with more than 50 people where social distancing can't be maintained. (This may include workplaces, stores, restaurants, places of worship, etc.). This means avoiding direct contact such as hand shaking and hugging, and maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres between you and others. Restricting direct person-to-person contact will greatly reduce the spread of the virus. It is unknown how long this will be needed. The need for social distancing will be monitored closely in the weeks and months ahead.

We have attached an information graphic to help explain social distancing. Please follow these - even if you are not worried about your own health, taking these simple steps could save the lives of your loved ones.

SEEING YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR

You will notice changes when you contact your Family Doctor's office. These have been put in place to reduce the spread of this virus - not only amongst our patients, many of whom are frail and elderly, but amongst the physicians and their teams. We want to make sure that doctors (and other primary care

providers including midwives and nurse practitioners) and their teams stay healthy so that they can continue to look after you.

To delay spread of COVID-19 we are reducing face-to-face contacts. In many cases this will mean using phone-calls and online assessments and follow ups. All physicians are able to provide effective care in this way and will ensure the patient is brought to the office for an examination when needed. By cutting down on the number of face-to-face visits we are also using social distancing by minimizing the number of patients in the waiting room.

For patients who have stable chronic disease, we may encourage you to consider delaying any non-urgent lab work to decrease your need to go to the laboratory. We may lengthen prescription supplies to lower your need to go the drug store. If you become unwell or your disease becomes unstable then you should contact your clinic.

Do not drop in to your doctor's office. You may well be turned away. It is best to call ahead, or make contact first through other channels such as email or through online portals as they become available.

Employers – A reminder that it is time to stop asking your employees for sick notes for self-limiting illness, including those who develop a mild form of Coronavirus. In many cases doctors will refuse to offer them.

TESTING FOR COVID-19

Doctors get new information regularly, including the latest screening guidelines. Testing is available for all who need it. Not everyone needs to be screened, even if you have symptoms. If you develop symptoms, call your Family Doctor, you can often be managed at home. You can also use the BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool which you can complete for yourself or on behalf of someone else if they are unable to <https://COVID19.thrive.health/>

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

People with respiratory symptoms who are:

- Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized
- Health Care Workers
- Residents of long term care facilities
- Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak

Remember, it is not testing that will limit this illness...it is social distancing and self-isolation that will.

Who should self-isolate?

Self-isolation is a critical step that you must take to limit the spread of infection in the community. If you develop cough, congestion, or fever, YOU MUST SELF-ISOLATE until symptoms resolve. If you are unsure, in the current situation, we ask that you assume that you have contracted the COVID-19

infection and self-isolate. This is no reason to panic and immediately seek medical attention. A positive test does not change the treatment of a COVID-19 infection. Most infected people will only develop a mild respiratory infection and will recover within 2 weeks.

If you become more unwell then this is the time to contact your Family Doctor. If you are unclear, then please do contact your Family Doctor.

EMERGENCY ROOM AT COWICHAN DISTRICT HOSPITAL

PLEASE do not go to the Emergency Room for testing. You should only go to the Emergency Room if you are experiencing a medical emergency.

Steps are underway to ensure the hospital is able to deal with the COVID-19 situation as it changes. This includes postponement of elective surgeries and detailed plans to ensure they are ready to manage the forthcoming challenge. Your hospital specialists, alongside our hospital administration, are working tirelessly to deliver effective care for all eventualities.

Also, consider modifying risk-taking activities. Maybe mountain bike a bit less aggressively, take more care out driving - anything that reduces trips to the Emergency Room. If you do come to the emergency room, be aware that the flow of patients has changed. Please listen to the greeting ambassadors and read the signs carefully.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Life for all of us is going to be different and at times very difficult through this year and possibly beyond. Please ensure you get time away from worrying about COVID-19 - for example spend time alone or with close ones away from others in the beautiful environment we live in.

Most of us will be fine through this difficult time, more of us will be fine if we stick together and act responsibly. Take the time to eat healthily, exercise, and find new ways to relax.

You can find some tips/techniques for relaxation through this link to the "Coronavirus Sanity Guide" This page is accessible to anyone for free from the Ten Percent Happier website:

<https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide>

TAKING CARE OF OUR COMMUNITY

Again, even if you are unconcerned about the risk to yourself of COVID-19, you **must** use social distancing to delay the spread of this virus. With no known cure or vaccine for COVID-19, preventing transmission is absolutely critical at this stage. There have been patients in their 30s in Italy, previously fit and well, who are currently being ventilated. When a hospital is overwhelmed, even a minor car accident could have serious consequences because of the high demand for hospital care.

Please consider checking in on your vulnerable, isolated neighbours - see that they have all they need. Always use social distancing, including keeping 2 metres from others, isolating if unwell and frequent hand washing,

This is also a time to think of the broader community. Many community organizations will find themselves in need. Consider connecting with [Social Planning Cowichan](#) to see how you might be able to help or if your organization is in need. And please remember, if you're a volunteer, practice social distancing, wash your hands, and keep yourself safe and healthy. Go to the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) website for the most up to date information and protocols.

NEED MORE INFORMATION:

To avoid overloading resources at 811, people can also call 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319) for the Province's COVID-19 information hotline. The toll-free phone line is open between 7:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. seven days a week for non-medical information about the virus. That includes the latest information on travel recommendations and social distancing, as well as access to support and services from the provincial and federal governments.

The BC government is also offering an online self-assessment service (<https://COVID19.thrive.health/>) for people who want to check their health status and recommendations for the right steps to take.

BC Centre for Disease Control website (<http://COVID-19.bccdc.ca/>)

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About the Cowichan Division of Family Practice

The Cowichan Division of Family Practice brings family doctors together to identify opportunities for improving the delivery of local health care. We are committed to achieving meaningful change that benefits patients, doctors, and our community as a whole.

About the Cowichan District Medical Society

The Cowichan District Medical Society (CDMS) members are the physicians, midwives, dentists and nurse practitioners who help care for patients at the Cowichan District Hospital. Our mission is to promote engagement of our members in collaborating both between ourselves and with our partners in attaining the highest possible level of health and well-being for the people of our region.

SOCIAL DISTANCING:

What does it mean?

Social distancing means reducing close contact between people to slow the spread of infectious diseases.

Slowing the spread of the virus will help our hospitals be able to care for patients. If too many people get sick at once they might not be able to care for everyone who needs help.

| AVOID | USE CAUTION / LIMIT <small>wash hands or use hand sanitizer after, keep space from others</small> | SAFE TO DO <small>keep space from others, wipe down plastics and wash hands after touching packaging</small> | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playdates Playgrounds House Parties Bars Non-essential travel Museums, Arcades, Malls Church Services Sleep Overs Concerts, Sporting Events, Theater Gyms Group Hangouts Weddings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grocery Stores Take Out Food Pick Up Medications Contact a Neighbor, Friend or Relative to ask if you can drop off groceries/medication at door | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch TV or Movie (at home) Read a Book Play Video Games Listen to Music Game Night Yard Work Take a Walk* Go for a Hike* Play in your yard* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video Chat Take a Class Online Virtual Tour a Museum Paint Cook Offer Your Skills to Others Electronically Be Creative |

* Do these things alone or with members of your household

Acknowledgement: This article was originally developed by our colleagues at the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice.