

March 23, 2020

Press Release from the Nanaimo Division of Family Practice re: Patient Info for Covid-19

Contact: Leslie Keenan, Executive Director, Nanaimo Division of Family Practice
Lkeenan@divisionsbc.ca

We're grateful to our Division colleagues in the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice for sharing their press release with us. We have shared below with the Nanaimo context added.

We know that you in the community are quite rightly concerned and anxious about COVID-19.

Our members: family physicians, emergency room physicians, hospitalists, family medicine residents and nurse practitioners are organizing to respond to the situation as it evolves. For timely and accurate information regarding the novel COVID-19 pandemic, see www.bccdc.ca or www.healthlinkbc.ca for up-to-date information. [Here is a video from two of our local family physicians](#). 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.

We want to send out a clear message to you about how local primary 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 specific locations of confirmed cases are not publicly available. We do know Covid-19 is 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.

Part of our plan to reduce the spread of the virus is to ensure everyone knows that social distancing is important. **THIS APPLIES TO EVERYONE**. There are patients in their 30s in Italy, previously fit and well, who are currently in intensive care units. 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 with other people. 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 ahead.

We attach a photograph demonstrating social distancing. Please practice this - 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

We want to make sure that doctors and other primary care providers and their teams stay healthy so they can continue to look after you. Please call your doctor's office first and follow posted notices in the clinics.

To delay spread of COVID-19 physicians and nurse practitioners may be reducing face-to-face contacts. In many cases this will mean using phone-calls and online assessments and follow ups. This also supports

social distancing by minimizing the number of patients in the waiting room. Your primary care provider will ensure you are brought to the office for an examination if needed.

For patients who have stable chronic disease, primary care providers will take measures to support your social distancing such as encouraging you to consider delaying any non-urgent lab work to decrease your need to go to the laboratory, or lengthening prescription supplies to lower your need to go the drug store.

If you become unwell or your disease becomes unstable, call your clinic as usual.

Do not drop into your doctor's office. You may well be turned away. It is best to call ahead.

Employers – Dr Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer for BC legislated under emergency powers that “All employers must waive the requirement for employees to produce a sick note”. Sick notes place an unnecessary burden on the health care system at a time when physicians and nurse practitioners need to focus on addressing one of the biggest public health challenges of our time.

Testing For COVID-19

Doctors and nurse practitioners get new information regularly from the Province's team of public health specialists, 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 or nurse practitioner, who can advise. You can also use the BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool <https://COVID19.thrive.health/>

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

Current testing is limited to people with respiratory symptoms who are:

- Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized
- Health Care Workers
- Residents of Long-Term Care facilities
- Part of a Public Health investigation of a known 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 for 14 days. If you are unsure, in the current situation, assume 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 doctor or nurse practitioner. If you are unclear, then please do contact your provider.

Emergency Room at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital (NRGH)

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. The province has postponed elective surgeries to free up hospital beds. Your hospital specialists, alongside Island Health, are working tirelessly to deliver effective care for all eventualities.

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.

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. When a hospital is overwhelmed, even a minor car accident could have serious consequences because of the high demand for hospital care.

While following social distancing, do check in on your vulnerable, isolated neighbours - see that they have all they need.

Demand on food banks will be high, please consider donating to help others.

Need More Information:

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

Roger Walmsley, MD
Board Chair
Nanaimo Division of Family Practice
www.divisionsbc.ca/nanaimo
www.fetchbc.ca

Dr. Poteryko and Dr. Fukunaga,
Family Physicians demonstrating
social distancing at the
recommended 2 metres or
approximately 2 arms-lengths

