

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

This will be our last Community Update for the foreseeable future, as restrictions continue to lift and we keep pushing closer to something like normal. Though the current wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has eased off, it is likely that we will continue to deal with COVID-19 for some time to come. What that looks like remains to be seen, but we hope that we will be able to manage future waves effectively with vaccines and COVID-specific treatments.

As we wind down the Physician Task Force, we remain incredibly grateful to be a part of this community, where so many people did everything they could to keep the Coast safe during this pandemic. We would also like to say a special thank you to all the healthcare workers, first responders, and essential workers who have worked so hard to keep us all safe over the past two years. You have been and continue to be an inspiration to us and have touched so many people's lives in so many positive ways - thank you!

Two years ago this month, when it became clear that this was going to be a world-wide pandemic with the potential for widespread loss of life, and when no-one knew much about COVID-19, let alone how to prevent or treat it, we all dug in to take the basic precautions that helped to limit spread of COVID-19. Throughout 2020 and the first part of 2021, physical distancing, hand washing, mask wearing and limiting social contacts were the only real tools that we had at our disposal. Even so, most of us did what we had to do for the good of our community and particularly the most vulnerable among us.

Over the past year, with widespread effective vaccinations and the development of effective treatments for COVID-19, we have been able to prevent severe infections and death despite the much higher rates of infection that came with removing restrictions and opening things up. Moving forward, vaccinations and new COVID treatments look like they will remain the mainstay of our approach as we deal with the next phases of COVID-19. Hopefully we will be able to avoid a return to the restrictions of the past couple of years, but that will depend on how effective our vaccines and treatments are against future COVID-19 variants, as well as the virulence and infectivity of future variants.

In the meantime, restrictions continue to lift, with mask mandates now lifted in most settings and vaccine passports no longer required in restaurants as of April 8th. Despite this, we would still encourage people who are at higher risk to wear masks in public indoor spaces and to limit social contact. Please continue to respect those who continue to wear masks, as well as businesses that require masks, as masks do remain effective for reducing risk of infection.

As of March 28, the Respiratory Assessment Clinic will no longer be available for testing or assessment, though eligible high risk patients and health care workers can still be tested in the Emergency Department or through their family doctor's office. If you are unsure as to whether you qualify for PCR testing, please visit the COVID-19 self-assessment tool. Most people however, should be self-testing at home; as of last week, everyone in BC who is over the age of 18 now qualifies for up to five free rapid home tests per month. You can obtain your free test kits by presenting your health card at any of our local pharmacies.

If you have mild COVID-19 symptoms, please do a rapid antigen test at home. Regardless of the result, please self-isolate until you are afebrile and feeling better. If you test positive, you should self-isolate for at least five days. To help track infection rates as accurately as possible, please submit any positive test results to the BCCDC at [reportcovidresults.bccdc.ca](https://reportcovidresults.bccdc.ca). As always, if you are having ongoing or worsening symptoms, particularly chest pain, confusion, difficulty staying awake, or difficulty breathing, please call 911 and go to the Sechelt Hospital Emergency Department for further assessment.



With respect to COVID-19 vaccinations, these remain our best and most effective defense against severe infection, hospitalization and death. This is true for the Omicron variant as well as the newer BA.2 variant that is currently becoming dominant. As most people in our community are now fully vaccinated, local vaccine clinics are no longer being held. However, you can still get vaccinated through our Public Health offices by registering online at [getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca](https://getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca), by calling 1-833-838-2323, or in person at any Service BC location.

If you (or your children over five) have not yet been vaccinated or are only partially vaccinated, we would strongly recommend that you get fully vaccinated as soon as possible. This is true even if you have had COVID already, as the immune response to a COVID infection is highly variable and much less likely to provide protection against future infection. Far too many people have died and/or suffered unnecessarily as a result of delaying or avoiding vaccination over the past year, and every person who gets vaccinated reduces that risk.

Thank you all for your support and kind words over the past two years. Keep well, stay positive, and keep doing everything you can to protect yourself and those around you.

Sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Baxter  
Dr Ted Krickan  
Dr Herman Mentz  
Dr Brian Nelson  
Dr Daren Spithoff