

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Over the last number of weeks, we have seen various claims for COVID-19 cures that turned out to be unsubstantiated or even dangerous. All of us would love to see an effective treatment for COVID-19 and with it, a return to normal. Unfortunately, despite ongoing efforts to identify something that might help, there remains no proven treatment for COVID-19 and our only tool remains prevention through social distancing and frequent handwashing.

In order for a treatment to be deemed effective, it has to be tested in a way that proves it is effective and safe. While there are well constructed studies underway, most of the data we have seen to date is based on observational studies and case reports, which are good for raising awareness, providing initial data and identifying possible avenues for research, but are not good for proving the effectiveness of a given treatment.

We saw this recently with hydroxychloroquine, where a small early study suggested it might help with COVID-19. Subsequent well-controlled studies have not shown any benefit with hydroxychloroquine and in fact have demonstrated increased mortality rates and an increased risk for heart rhythm problems.

Similarly, a study released last week indicated that people who smoke may have lower COVID-19 infection rates. Please do not take this as a reason to continue smoking or to start smoking, as this is only preliminary data that will guide further research.

Even if smoking were found to provide some degree of protection against COVID-19, this would not outweigh the many many well studied reasons not to smoke, including, but not limited to, increased risks for chronic breathing problems and various cancers, as well as heart disease and stroke. As well, smoking is known to suppress the immune system, which also increases the risk for any type of infection, so we would continue to strongly encourage smoking cessation if you do smoke.

If you do smoke (or vape) this is as good a time as any to quit. If you would like to quit smoking, please contact your family doctor (or your nearest clinic if you do not have a family doctor) to discuss your options.

You can also access the QuitNow program, which is free to all people living in BC at the [QuitNow website](#), by texting QUITNOW to 654321, or by calling 1-877-455-2233. The QuitNow program provides up to three months of nicotine replacement therapy and includes coaching support, access to a peer community, medication information, and other resources.

Stressful times are often linked to increased rates of alcohol, cannabis and other substance use. This can sometimes lead to associated problems, including addiction, relationship problems, legal issues, and employment challenges.

If substance use is or has become a problem for you, please reach out as there are many resources in our community to help. Your family doctor is a good resource and you can contact Addictions Services at 604-885-6101 to speak to a counsellor seven days a week. If you would like to find a local support or self-help group, please call 310-6789.

As we move towards another weekend, please continue to practice social distancing by staying at home except for essential reasons. If you are outside your home, please maintain two metres between yourself and anyone else. Consider wearing a mask in public places and wash your hands frequently. We may have to continue these practices even when things start to open up, so please prepare for this.

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If you develop mild cold or flu symptoms, please contact your family doctor or the Respiratory Assessment Clinic to arrange for testing and assessment. You will be required to self-isolate until you are cleared.

If your COVID-19 test comes back positive, you will need to continue self-isolating, as will your recent contacts. Public Health will follow up with you and your contacts to arrange for further assessment and testing where necessary. Self isolation guidelines are available at: [BC CDC](#)

If you develop more severe cold or flu-like symptoms and feel you need to see a doctor, please call or text the Respiratory Assessment Clinic at 604-740-1252 or email coastrespclinic@gmail.com. If your symptoms are severe enough to require an ambulance to get to hospital, please call 911.

Please note that the Respiratory Assessment Clinic is open seven days a week from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM and is intended for people living or staying on the Sunshine Coast.

We have recently seen a number of people in the Emergency Department who delayed seeking care until they were sick enough to be hospitalized. Please remember that our local medical clinics and emergency department remain open (and safe) to see anyone who needs medical care.

Please do not hesitate to contact your family doctor if you have concerns about your health. If you do not have a family doctor, please call your nearest medical clinic, as each clinic is providing virtual care for people in this situation.

Please check the Coast Reporter and the Local Weekly websites regularly for updates on COVID-19 in our community, and tune in daily on Eastlink Community TV at 5:30, 7:30 and 10:00 PM. The SCR and the Town of Sechelt are also putting out regular COVID-19 emergency updates with community-specific information on local government services.

Keep well, wash your hands, keep your distance, and stay at home unless you have a medical emergency or another essential task! And **please keep howling!**

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

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