

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Since British Columbia started reopening last week, the number of new COVID-19 cases has remained low across the province, with an average of ten people testing positive daily. On the one hand this is reassuring, as it suggests that the prevalence of COVID-19 remains low. On the other hand, it is still too early to say that we have nothing to worry about, because it will take a few weeks before we know for sure. It is also important to remain cautious given rising COVID-19 numbers after reopenings in many other places across Canada and North America.

It is a delicate balance. If we move too fast, we run the risk of seeing a significant spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths. If we move too slow, we will see lives impacted negatively in many other ways. As we continue to gather information by testing everyone with symptoms (and the contacts of people who test positive), we should be able to quickly identify if the number of infections starts to rise.

It looks like blood testing to determine who has already had COVID-19 infection will be available soon. This will give us further information about COVID-19 immunity in BC and help guide future decision-making. If you are interested in being part of research to study this, please fill out the [BCCDC COVID-19 Survey](#), which will allow you to sign up for possible future testing. The survey deadline is May 31st.

The [BCCDC COVID-19 Survey](#) also looks at the impact that COVID-19 has had in our lives and whether people have had symptoms consistent with COVID-19. We know that a number of Sunshine Coasters have already filled out the survey, but we need as many people as possible to get accurate information about our community. Preliminary results indicate that we need more men and more seniors to do the survey, so if you fall into this category, please take a few minutes to do this before the end of the month.

Locally, COVID-19 prevalence remains very low, which is a credit to the sacrifices we have all made over the past two months. Of course, in a small community like ours, any kind of community or facility outbreak could have a major impact on our local healthcare system and our community.

If we are going to be successful in minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on the Coast over the coming months, we need to continue exercising the basic precautions that have helped us get to this point. Even as we expand our social circles, businesses, and activities, we need to continue practicing physical distancing (at least six feet between ourselves and others) and frequent handwashing. If we are going to be in close contact with others in an enclosed space, we should wear a mask.

With the summer just around the corner, we would continue to encourage you to stay local as much as possible. As Dr Bonnie Henry has recommended, we should all continue to avoid non-essential travel. This will help to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19 to other communities or bringing COVID-19 back to the Sunshine Coast. So, if you find yourself craving a Costco hotdog, or missing downtown Vancouver traffic, or itching to spend a few hours in a ferry lineup, we would ask that you hold off for the time being.

If you do [develop new cold or flu symptoms](#), please stay home from work or school, self-isolate according to [BCCDC guidelines](#), and call your family doctor or the Respiratory Assessment Clinic. Please do this even if you only have mild symptoms, as this will help prevent an outbreak if you do have COVID-19, and will also help us develop as accurate a picture of current local COVID-19 activity as possible

As of June 1st, the Respiratory Assessment Clinic will be reducing hours to 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM from Monday to Friday. Please call or text 604-740-1252 or email coastrespclinic@gmail.com to book for a virtual assessment. If needed, further assessment and testing will be arranged through the Respiratory Assessment Clinic. Please note that the clinic is for people living and staying on the Sunshine Coast.

If you develop mild cold or flu symptoms on a weekend, you are welcome to self-isolate and wait until the Respiratory Assessment Clinic opens on Monday. Please proceed to the Sechelt Hospital Emergency Department if you don't feel you can wait. If you need an ambulance, please call 911. Please note that the Emergency Department remains open and safe for all patients with a medical emergency.

Those of you with school-age children are well aware that our local schools will be opening in a limited capacity starting next week. Given the current low prevalence of COVID-19 on the Coast, we agree that it is a safe time to do this. However, if you would prefer to keep your child(ren) at home for the remainder of the school year, the [school district](#) will provide ongoing support for learning at home.

Please continue to encourage your children to maintain social distancing as much as possible, to wash their hands frequently, and to avoid touching their faces. This can be challenging, especially with younger children, but it remains vitally important that we all do what we can to minimize the risk of infection and transmission.

If your child develops any cold or flu-like symptoms, please keep her or him home. Although the risk of severe infection and death appear to be low for children, there is some data to suggest that children who are infected with COVID-19 have viral levels similar to that of adults. We still don't know whether this means that children can transmit COVID-19 as effectively as adults (though anyone with young children knows how effectively they can transmit other viruses), so we would encourage you to err on the side of caution until we have more definitive information.

Regardless of your comfort level with opening up, please continue to engage in the fundamental practices of good community as well. Please do what you can to keep yourself and others safe, treat others with kindness and respect, especially if you disagree with them. Please continue to look for ways to support and encourage your neighbours, friends and family. Look for ways to contribute to our community and please try to support local businesses if you have the means to do so.

Please check the [Coast Report](#) and [The Local Weekly](#) regularly for updates on COVID-19 in our community. As local parks, programs and facilities continue opening up, please visit the [SCRD](#) and the websites for updates.

Keep well, stay local, wash your hands, keep your distance, and please keep doing everything you can to keep our community safe!

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

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