

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we have seen a doubling in the daily number of new COVID-19 cases in BC over the past two weeks, mostly driven by an outbreak in Kelowna. Although we cannot talk about specific cases or locations due to standing Public Health policy, COVID-19 case numbers are rising within our own health region as well. This brings it much closer to home and serves as a good reminder that the pandemic has not gone away. It also reinforces the point that we can't rely on our early success to provide ongoing protection; we have to keep working together as a community to help prevent a major outbreak here on the Sunshine Coast.

This will not be easy. Unlike other major natural disasters like earthquakes or hurricanes which wreak their destruction in a matter of seconds or days, pandemics roll out slowly and insidiously. The deadliest pandemic in recorded human history, the bubonic plague, lasted seven years. It is difficult to maintain a high level of vigilance for months, let alone years, but we will have to keep doing this for the foreseeable future.

While progress is being made on a number of vaccines, it will still be at least six months before we have one available, and possibly much longer than that. In the meantime, we will have to rely on good old-fashioned common sense and community-based efforts to successfully prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

Across British Columbia, the recent rise in new infections is being driven mostly by younger people who are more likely to have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. This is consistent with what we are seeing in the United States and elsewhere. While the risk of severe illness and death is lower in young healthy people, the big concern with this pattern of spread is that more widespread infection will eventually cross over to friends, family members and other contacts who are more vulnerable.

Another concern is that a rapid rise in case numbers will start to overwhelm our capacity to detect new infections and trace contacts in a timely manner. Our Respiratory Assessment Clinic is already operating at full capacity despite recently expanding hours and we need to be careful about protecting our limited resources.

So what do we need to do to protect our community? It comes down to the basic principles that we have all been hearing for months:

1. Maintain physical distancing with people outside of your household (or your very limited family/friend bubble) and wear a mask whenever you can't maintain a distance of at least two meters. If you are young and healthy, you are most likely to have minimal or no symptoms with COVID-19 and therefore highest risk for inadvertently spreading infection, so please wear a mask if you are going to be within two metres of anyone outside your bubble.
2. Wash your hands frequently, especially after touching high contact surfaces or spending time in a public area.
3. Do not touch your face (or your mask) unless you have just washed your hands, and make sure you wash your hands after touching your face (or your mask).
4. Avoid large groups if you can, especially indoors. If you do meet up with others, please meet up outside whenever possible, maintain physical distancing, and avoid sharing food with those outside of your close family/friend bubble.
5. Exercise extra caution if you are older, have high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease or other significant health issues.

Dr. Bonnie Henry's [Good Times Guide](#) provides additional tips for preventing COVID-19 infection for those in their 20s to 40s. Please do what you can to be safe out there!

If you are worried that you may have been exposed to COVID-19 after hearing about an outbreak in an area you have visited recently, the dates and locations of COVID-19 public exposures are now online for each Health Region ([Vancouver Coastal Health](#) , [Fraser Health](#), [Interior Health](#), [Vancouver Island Health](#), [Northern Health](#)).

Health Canada has also created [COVID Alert](#), a new app for iOS and Android that will notify you if you have been near anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (and has the app). It is completely anonymous and does not share your location or any identifying information. It is currently only active in Ontario but is expected to be launched Canada-wide soon, so not a bad idea to download the app if you are interested in having an extra layer of protection.

If you do develop [new cold or flu symptoms](#) (no matter how mild), please stay home and [self-isolate](#) until you have been assessed. Do not go to work. Do not go shopping. Do not meet up with others. Do call your family doctor or the Respiratory Assessment Clinic (Monday to Friday from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM) to arrange for further assessment and testing, if indicated. The Respiratory Assessment Clinic can be reached by phone or text at 604-740-1252 or by email at coastrespclinic@gmail.com.

We continue to test everyone with possible COVID-19 symptoms, so please do not hesitate to call if you become ill. If you have more severe symptoms and believe you may need to be admitted to hospital, please go to the Sechelt Hospital Emergency Department. If you need an ambulance, please call 911. Please remember that the Emergency Department is open and safe for anyone with a medical emergency.

With respect to non-emergent non-COVID-19 health issues, all of our family medicine clinics are currently booking people without a local family doctor. Our local medical clinics remain open Monday to Friday, with the Gibsons Medical Clinic providing additional hours on Saturday mornings. In order to provide as safe an environment as possible for both patients and staff, the majority of medical care will continue to be provided virtually. This is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. If you have a medical issue that requires a physical assessment, an in-person appointment will be arranged.

Please check the [Coast Reporter](#) and [The Local Weekly](#) for periodic updates on COVID-19 in our community. As local parks, programs and facilities open up, please visit the [SCRD](#), the [Town of Gibsons](#) , and the [District of Sechelt](#) websites for updates.

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

Sincerely,

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

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