

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

With a return to school just around the corner and COVID-19 numbers continuing to rise across the province, we know that many parents, teachers and students are concerned about the risks involved with coming back to school. While there is some risk that we will see COVID-19 within our schools once they reopen, schools play an essential role in the long-term health and well-being of our children, and we know that there are significant risks associated with not returning to school. Over the next number of months we are going to have to navigate the fine line between these two risks. With all of us working together, we hope that we can prevent any COVID-19 outbreaks and ensure a successful school year for everyone on the Coast.

We would encourage everyone to review the provincial [Back to School Plan](#), as well as our local [School District 46 Restart Plan](#). These plans have been developed in coordination with Vancouver Coastal Health as well as the Ministries of Health and Education to try and provide the safest possible environment for staff and students.

We will not go into the details of the return to school plans, which vary by school and grade level, but do want to highlight a few points which will help prevent a COVID-19 outbreak in our schools and in our community.

One of the biggest things that will determine our success is a commitment to treat each other with kindness and respect. Not everyone will have the same level of comfort with the risks associated with returning to school, and it is essential that we all recognize and respect these differences.

It is important to remember that while the school-based cohorts are regarded as much safer than interactions with total strangers in public places, cohorts will not become bubbles. Bubbles are very small groups of people that we interact with closely and without COVID-19 precautions. They should be limited to household members and no more than a few close friends. Cohorts are much larger groups that we interact with regularly while still maintaining COVID-19 precautions.

It is possible that other students in your cohort are part of your bubble. If so, you may continue to interact with them as you normally would. If you decide to expand your bubble to someone else inside your cohort, please make that decision only after discussing it with your family and those within your current bubble. Please remember that when you expand your bubble, it now includes everyone in that other person's bubble. Expanding your bubble does increase your risk of infection should anyone in your bubble contract COVID-19.

For those students returning to school, please continue to consistently practice [preventive measures](#). Maintain social distancing of at least two metres whenever possible, though it is acceptable to reduce that distance to one metre within your cohort at school. Wear a mask when in hallways, on school buses, or in other situations where it is impossible to maintain social distancing. [Wash your hands frequently](#), and especially after touching any surface that someone else might have touched. Always wash your hands before and after eating, drinking, or touching your face or mask (your mouth, nose and eyes are the main route of entry for COVID-19).

Of all the things that we can do to prevent an outbreak in our schools, the most important is for staff and students to stay home and [self-isolate](#) if any [potential COVID-19 symptoms](#) arise, no matter how mild those symptoms are. This allows us to identify infections and prevent further spread of COVID-19. If you have symptoms, please contact the Respiratory Assessment Clinic by phone or text at 604-740-1252, or by email at coastrespclinic@gmail.com. We are open seven days a week from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Please note that testing is available for people of all ages, including school age children and younger. Vancouver Coastal Health is currently trialing more comfortable ways of testing children (such as saliva testing), and we hope that this will be available locally in the near future. It is important that everyone be tested each time [potential COVID-19 symptoms](#) arise, so this means that some children may need to be tested multiple times during the school year.

If a teacher or student tests positive for COVID-19, they will be contacted by Public Health, who will try to determine the source of infection and work to identify everyone who might have been in close contact with the infected person. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be required to [self-isolate](#) for a minimum of ten days from the onset of symptoms. Close contacts will be required to [self-isolate](#) for fourteen days. Public Health will be in contact to provide guidance on when to return to school.

As a general rule, a positive case within a cohort will not result in the whole cohort or school being required to self-isolate, though this may happen if the source of infection cannot be identified or there is evidence of widespread infection (i.e. an outbreak). Isolated cases will not be announced publicly, but if an outbreak is identified, this information will be released as soon as possible. Decisions to notify staff and parents of other students will be made in consultation with Public Health and school officials.



Please note that if you have a negative swab you should stay home and self-isolate until your symptoms have resolved. If your symptoms worsen or do not improve as expected, please call the Respiratory Assessment Clinic for further assessment.

It is important to note that we continue to test everyone with possible COVID-19 symptoms at this time, 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.

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 online for each Health Region ([Vancouver Coastal Health](#), [Fraser Health](#), [Interior Health](#), [Vancouver Island Health](#), [Northern Health](#)).

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