

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

As most of you are already aware, this past weekend brought news of increasing COVID-19 cases across BC. It also brought a new [Public Health order](#) restricting social gatherings, travel, and indoor group physical activities across the Fraser Health and the Vancouver Coastal Health Regions, including the lower Sunshine Coast. The new order is effective immediately and will be in place until November 23, 2020. We know there has been a lot of confusion and some frustration around the new order, but it is clear from the most recent provincial data that we need to make changes or we will risk losing control of COVID-19 in our province.

Over the summer, through mid-September, the province was seeing a fairly linear increase in the number of cases, which was manageable in terms of testing, contact tracing, and hospitalizations. Over the past month however, this increase in the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths has shifted to an exponential pattern, suggesting that we are not containing COVID-19 in BC right now.

If this pattern continues, our ability to keep up with testing and contract tracing may become compromised, limiting our ability to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Unless we make changes immediately, we increase the risk of overwhelming our hospitals and ICUs, which would limit our ability to help those who are most severely affected by COVID-19, and would also compromise care for those with other severe but treatable medical problems.

Although we have done well relative to other areas in the Greater Vancouver area, and have fewer total cases (overall and as a percentage of our population) thus far, the number of local COVID-19 cases continues to rise. In the month of September, we had as many cases as we had in the entire span from January through August. We don't have [local COVID-19 data](#) available for October yet (it should be out within the next week), but we have no reason to believe that our local trends are any different from other communities in the North Shore Coast Garibaldi area, and we suspect that we will see an exponential increase in cases here on the Coast as well.

In short, we are at a critical juncture; if we buckle down right now and do everything we can to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in our community, we should be able to flatten the curve again. However, if current trends continue, we may be looking at further restrictions. Please redouble your efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 in our community. We know that this is another difficult ask in what has already been a hard year for everyone, but we believe the alternatives are worse.

In terms of the specifics of the Public Health order, the biggest impact on our day to day lives will be the restriction on social interactions and gatherings. We are being asked to "socialize only with those in [our] immediate household" and to avoid "gatherings of any size". This means that for at least the next two weeks we should not have any guests into our homes, and should only eat out with members of our household. Please avoid outdoor social gatherings and playdates as well.

The other big restriction is related to indoor group physical activities such as spin classes, dance classes, yoga and group fitness, as well as indoor sports where physical distancing cannot be maintained, such as boxing, martial arts, hockey, volleyball and basketball (with exemptions for school sports and activities). Individual indoor physical activities will continue to be permitted, provided that physical distancing and other infection prevention protocols are in place.

We know this will be a challenge for many of our local small businesses that provide indoor group physical activities, but it may be possible to resume indoor group physical activities with a small number of people, provided that appropriate physical distancing and infection control precautions are taken. We would encourage you to follow up with Vancouver Coastal Health at [ehvc@vch.ca](mailto:ehvc@vch.ca) to review your COVID-19 safety plan and determine whether you can resume indoor activities. We also encourage everyone to continue to support our local businesses and to help keep them afloat.

It is important to note that the above restrictions do not apply to individual and group outdoor physical activities, provided that appropriate social distancing and precautions are maintained. Wherever possible, we would encourage everyone to dress for the weather and get outside to maintain physical activity levels and stay healthy.

With respect to workplace safety, the new Public Health order requires all businesses to ensure that they are following their business restart plan, which includes active daily screening of all on-site workers and physical distancing wherever possible. Where physical distancing is not possible, masks should be worn.

Finally, under the new Public Health order, all travel into and out of the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley should be limited to essential travel only for the next two weeks. While we are technically part of the Lower

Mainland, we would recommend staying off the ferry unless you are travelling for things like work or medical appointments. Shopping, sports, visiting friends and relatives, and other non-essential reasons to travel should be put on hold for the time-being.

In addition to these Public Health orders, there has also been a change in policy regarding mask-wearing in all healthcare facilities, including family medicine and specialty clinics. Moving forward, only three-ply medical grade masks will be allowed, and will be required for anyone entering a healthcare facility. Fortunately, medical masks will be supplied by the Ministry of Health and will be available for anyone who does not already have one.

As before, we encourage everyone to continue with the basic preventative measures that will help keep infection rates low and limit the impact on our hospital and healthcare providers. Please keep at least two metres between yourself and anyone outside of your immediate household whenever possible. Please wear a mask when it is impossible to maintain social distancing. [Wash your hands frequently](#), and especially after touching any high contact surface. Always wash your hands before and after eating, drinking, or touching your face or mask.

Please remember that we continue to test everyone with potential COVID-19 symptoms in order to identify and isolate people with COVID-19 infections as quickly as possible. Please remember that the list of potential COVID-19 symptoms continues to include: fever, chills, a new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, loss of sense of smell or taste, headache, fatigue, diarrhea, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, and muscle aches. Please keep these symptoms in mind when trying to determine whether you or a loved one should be tested for COVID-19.

If you do develop cold, flu or [COVID-19 symptoms](#), please contact the Respiratory Assessment Clinic by phone or text at 604-740-1252, or by email at [coastrespclinic@gmail.com](mailto:coastrespclinic@gmail.com). The clinic remains open seven days a week from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. We would request that you leave a single message, text or email when contacting the clinic; we will contact you as soon as we are able and leaving multiple messages makes it more difficult for our staff to respond in a timely manner.

If you are awaiting assessment or test results, please [self-isolate](#) at home, ideally in a separate space where you can limit contact with other members of your household. This means staying home from work, school, and all other activities until you have tested negative and your symptoms have resolved. If you test positive for COVID-19, you will have to continue self-isolation until you are cleared by Public Health.

If you are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19, Public Health will contact you directly and advise you to self-isolate. You will not need to be tested unless you develop symptoms. Please note that to be regarded as a close contact, you have to be within six feet of an infected person for at least fifteen minutes.

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 remains 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](#)). School exposures in our area will also be posted on the [Vancouver Coastal Health website](#).

Please note that flu shots are still available and are recommended for everyone over six months old. Flu shots are available through a number of [local pharmacies](#) and through our local clinics. The [Gibsons Health Unit](#), [Sechelt Health Unit](#) and [Pender Harbour Health Centre](#) also have flu vaccines for families with children under 18.

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

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