

Dear Fellow Sunshine Coast Residents:

With the holiday season upon us and the highly transmissible Omicron variant traveling around the globe, we appear to be on the front end of a fifth wave of COVID-19. As you are likely aware, [new public health restrictions](#) have been announced in an effort to minimize the impact of this new variant in BC. The numbers rolling in from Denmark, the UK, and elsewhere are worrisome and we would encourage everyone to exercise every possible caution as we move through the next few weeks.

While we had a bit of a lull locally in late November and early December, we have had a significant increase in positive cases over the last few weeks, with almost two positive cases per day in the last week. We are working hard to expand our testing capacity and we are currently testing 30-40 people per day. If there is a delay in accessing testing over the coming weeks, please be patient and recognize that we are working as hard as we can with limited resources.

The [criteria for testing](#) have been updated recently: you must be symptomatic with at least one key COVID-19 symptom (fever or chills, new or worsening cough, difficulty breathing, or a loss of taste or smell) or at least two secondary COVID-19 symptoms (sore throat, extreme fatigue, headache, body aches, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea) that have lasted more than 24 hours. You also qualify for testing if you have one of the above symptoms and have had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, or if testing has been advised by Public Health.

If you do develop any of the above symptoms, please [self-isolate](#) immediately and arrange for testing as soon as you meet [testing criteria](#). You should arrange for testing even if you have been vaccinated. The Respiratory Assessment Centre is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 to 3:30 and appointments can be booked by phoning or texting us at 604-740-1252, or by email at [coastrespclinic@gmail.com](mailto:coastrespclinic@gmail.com).

Please do not book in at the Respiratory Clinic if you do not have symptoms, as we have limited capacity and we need to identify COVID-19 cases as soon as possible to help limit transmission. If you require testing for travel, work or personal reasons, rapid testing and PCR testing are available through Sechelt Pharmacy.

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.

In terms of preventing COVID-19 infection, and particularly severe infection and death, the best possible thing you can do is to get vaccinated. As evidenced by data from the United States and elsewhere, unvaccinated people are experiencing much higher rates of severe illness and death. This is what we are seeing here on the Coast as well; most of the people we are transferring to ICUs in the city for COVID-19 infection are unvaccinated (despite the fact that they are a small proportion of our population).

Please remember that being vaccinated significantly reduces your risk of becoming severely ill with COVID-19, but it does not eliminate that risk. People with underlying health issues are much less likely to develop severe illness if they are vaccinated, but do have increased risk compared to an otherwise healthy vaccinated person.

If you have not yet been vaccinated, please register at [getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca](https://getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca), at 1-833-838-2323, or in person at any Service BC location. You are also welcome to drop in to any of our vaccination clinics for your first dose (appointments are required for second and third doses). Vaccinations are now available for everyone aged five and older and we would strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Every person who is vaccinated helps to reduce the risk for everyone else.

Overall, we remain a little behind other areas in the Vancouver Coastal Health region, with 86% of people over 18 having two vaccine doses. This compares to 96% in some other areas, so we still have some work to do. That being said, we are doing well with our first dose rollout for children aged 5-11, with approximately 24% vaccinated, and we are doing very well with our third dose rollout, with 19% vaccinated.

Early data suggests that having a third vaccine dose provides significant protection against the Omicron variant. We are working hard to make third doses available to everyone as soon as they are [eligible](#). Please make sure that you are registered and sign up as soon as you are notified by text or email.

In the meantime, please do everything you can to protect our community and your loved ones. Please limit gatherings as per the new [public health orders](#) and try to limit your potential exposure as much as possible by maintaining physical distance and wearing masks in public places. Regular hand washing is always a good idea.



Please review the new public health orders to ensure that you are following the most recent recommendations. Household gatherings are limited to two households or one household plus ten visitors, and everyone at that gathering who is 12 years or older should be vaccinated. All organized events require proof of vaccination and everyone in attendance must wear a mask. Sadly, indoor New Year's Eve parties are not allowed, and any large events are restricted to 50% capacity. Sports tournaments are also not allowed. Please note that these restrictions will remain in place until at least January 4, 2022.

Keep well, stay positive, and keep doing everything you can to protect yourself and those around you. Best wishes from all of us for the holiday season!

Sincerely,

The Sunshine Coast COVID Physician Task Force

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