

March 11, 2020

On the day the [World Health Organization](#) has officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic, we are sharing that Island Health has confirmed the first presumptive case of COVID-19 on the Island.

This information was provided in today's update from Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and Health Minister Adrian Dix. You will find their [joint statement](#) posted here when it is available.

The 63-year-old man is recovering at home and in good condition, and we are confident that all appropriate Infection Prevention and Control measures were in place for his screening and contact with Island Health.

This is a good reminder of how important it is that you take the time to follow appropriate Infection Prevention and Control protocols for the work you do. Up to date information on recommended practices can be found on our [COVID-19 intranet page](#) and on our [Medical Staff site](#).

For clinical staff, please pay close attention to infection prevention and control measures for any patient with respiratory or flu-like symptoms. [Droplet and contact precautions](#) include procedure mask (not N95), visor, gloves and gown. N95 masks need to be preserved for aerosolizing practices. Particular attention is required during [donning](#) and [doffing](#) PPE, please click the links for short videos to remind you of the steps required. It is a good idea to use the buddy system to observe each other, particularly while doffing PPE. Where there have been problems with transmission of this virus, it has been because people did not follow recommended precautions.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Island Health is continuing our planning work led by the Executive Emergency Operations Committee, with five subcommittees – Clinical Services, Logistics and Supplies, People (HR), Finance and Public Health. Their work is focused on the four key priorities established by the provincial government's [COVID-19 Pandemic Response Plan](#):

- Protecting the public
- Protecting vulnerable populations
- Protecting health workers
- Supporting Health-care capacity

Here are a few highlights of our work to date:

- A community-testing site was opened this morning at the Victoria Health Unit, to help take the pressure of our South Island Primary Care providers and Emergency Departments. The testing site is appointment based by referral only through doctors and 8-1-1. Plans are in the works for other communities should the volume of testing require alternate screening locations.
- Our Island Health lab is now capable of doing our own testing for COVID 19, preventing the need to send all samples to the BCCDC. This means for samples we are able to process in-house, we

can provide results within 24 hours. In BC, COVID-19 testing is being done on all swabs submitted for Influenza A/B and RSV.

Island Health has a robust influenza pandemic plan created in response to H1N1 that is informing our response to COVID-19. Through the EOC structure, we have the right people in place to review and update this plan as needed, in broad consultation with key stakeholders and subject matter experts across the organization. We are working in alignment with the provincial Health Emergency Management structure and other health authorities.

HOT TOPICS FOR STAFF

Communications

- There was overwhelming interest in our town hall meeting on Tuesday. We apologize to those who were unable to join the call due to capacity issues. [Here is the transcript](#) of the meeting. We are still working on getting answers to questions that were posted on Sli.do, and will post those as soon as possible.
- We are working hard to find solutions to provide expanded capacity to the next town hall on March 17th, and will share details as soon as they are known.

Staff Who Have Travelled to Affected Areas

- Individuals who have recently travelled to Hubei province in China, and Iran, PHAC asks that they self-isolate for 14 days, even if they do not develop symptoms - [read more information](#).
- Individuals who have recently travelled back from other affected area (as defined by the travel advisory), PHAC asks that you:
 - monitor your health for fever, cough and difficulty breathing; and
 - avoid crowded public spaces and places where you cannot easily separate yourself from others if you become ill.
 - If you start having symptoms, isolate yourself from others as quickly as possible. Immediately call a health care professional. Describe your symptoms and travel history. They will provide advice on what you should do.

Human Resources

Compensation:

- If you are advised to self-isolate because of travel or community exposure, you will be placed on general leave with pay. Please stay in touch with your manager about when you will return to work.
- Casual employees who are asked to self-isolate will be paid for any accepted shifts that were cancelled by reason of the general leave.
- If you are exposed to COVID-19 at work and are instructed to self-isolate, you will be placed on general leave with pay.
- If you become ill during self-isolation, sick leave would be applied.

- If COVID-19 is confirmed following a workplace exposure, it would become a WorkSafeBC claim and sick leave banks would be restored.

Vacation:

- Island Health will allow nurses to cancel union or vacation leave over the next 60 days.
- Please provide as much notice as possible so we can effectively redeploy staff.
- If you have questions about this, please contact your manager.

The Situation in Canada

- As of March 10, 2020, Canada has reported 93 COVID-19 infections.
- The Government of Canada is asking Canadians to review [travel advisories](#) before they leave the country. As well, the risk for COVID-19 may be increased for certain settings such as:
 - cruise ships
 - heavily affected areas
 - international conferences and other large gatherings in enclosed spaces
- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) continues to assess the public health risk associated with the virus as low in Canada.

The Situation in BC

- As of March 10, more than 4000 tests have been performed for COVID-19 in BC.
- COVID-19 testing is now recommended for individuals with a fever and/or cough who traveled outside of Canada OR
 - had close contact with a confirmed case; OR
 - had close contact with a person with respiratory illness who has been to an [affected area](#) within 14 days prior to their symptom onset; OR
 - had laboratory exposure to biological material that contains COVID-19.
- Please continue to check the national guidance frequently, as criteria for screening, testing and public health management will continue to be updated.

Your Sources of Information

- While our understanding and our response to the COVID-19 outbreaks evolve, we will be sending weekly updates to Island Health staff. These will be included in The Weekly each Wednesday. Additional information will be shared by email as required.
- The BCCDC website has a publicly accessible, [dedicated area](#) for health professionals as well as [comprehensive information for the public](#)
- For site-specific questions, please check in with your manager or clinical leadership.
- For trusted information from around the world, please check the [World Health Organization](#) website.

COVID-19 Weekly Update #2



This important work is Island Health's highest priority. Your leadership team recognizes the organization may need to slow or pause other work to ensure we are able to respond as needed to this evolving situation.

Please continue to use vigilance to protect yourself and our patients and communities – clean your hands often, avoid touching your face, cough or sneeze into your elbow sleeve and dispose of tissues appropriately. It is also very important to stay home and away from others, if you or your family are sick.

Thank you to everyone who across Island Health who is involved in and helping to support this planning.

QUESTIONS?

Email pathogen@viha.ca. The comments for Weekly articles have been disabled.