

COVID-19 Town Hall Q&A



July 28, 2020

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

(Please note: the information in this document is accurate as of Tuesday, August 4, 2020)

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

HUMAN RESOURCES 1

PUBLIC HEALTH/MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER 3

INFECTION PREVENTION & CONTROL/PPE 4

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES 5

SERVICE DELIVERY 5

OPERATIONS & SUPPORT 5

HUMAN RESOURCES

Pandemic Pay:

When should social workers expect lump sump payment? **AND What is the status, and when can we expect, the pandemic pay from the government?**

There are many agencies across the Province that receive funding from a number of different B.C. funding sources, including our health authority. Provincial funders, including the Ministry of Health, are working with the Ministry of Finance to create a streamlined, coordinated approach to ensure eligible agencies have a clear process to follow and receive the funding to distribute to employees. It is our expectation to provide more detailed information by August 17, 2020. In the interim, please refer to the TPP information posted on www.gov.bc.ca/pandemicpay, which will include some general updates periodically. We appreciate the online information will not be able to address all the specific questions that you may have at this time. However, we will endeavor to communicate more detailed information as it becomes available.

With the increased focus on work-life balance + alternate work arrangements to support staff during COVID, why are job share requests still denied routinely?

Job share requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. They often involve multiple partners (union, leaders and employees). Please discuss with your leader to determine whether a job-share arrangement is feasible for you and your work area.

How do we know that staff who are sick are appropriately tested and are negative before they come back to work? There is no follow up or enforcement on this.

It is the responsibility of the sick or symptomatic individual to maintain self-isolation until they have a negative test result. If you are symptomatic even after a negative COVID test, please stay home until you are well.

Childcare:

What is the plan for essential workers and childcare come the fall? Will this still be an option? **AND If kids cannot go to school when sick, how is IH going to support parents? Do we use all our sick time and leave floors short constantly? Is there a plan?**

To prepare for the school year ahead, parents are encouraged to have a plan. A childcare plan is necessary for the flexibility that may be required with in-class learning and for when children are home sick. When your child is sick, there may be a leave day that is available to you (i.e. a vacation day). In terms of ensuring adequate staffing, Island Health remains committed to strategic talent acquisition practices and initiatives to ensure we have the workforce, including casual employees that may be needed for unforeseen absences. Please [read more](#) about plans for school-aged children K-12 from the Ministry of Education.

Support for Staff:

So many new Directors doing very important work, so few admin staff to support them. We are burning out. Where can we seek help/advice? **AND Are we considering modification to health plans to better support staff (i.e. allowances for counselling, physical therapy for extended work from home strains, etc.)?**

If you are experiencing burnout, please speak with your leader to find out what supports are available to you or discuss opportunities to mitigate the pressures. Other supports for self-care are also available [here](#).

For non-clinical employees working remotely, when will the option to permanently change their positions, as fully/partially working from home be an option?

A cross functional team within Island Health are currently working to develop a comprehensive remote work strategy for our organization. We anticipate this strategy to be available in September. If you are working remotely now, please continue to do so until instructed to return to the office environment by your leader. Please read our update about [Working From Home](#).

WorkSafeBC states "... offer in-person services only if necessary." This standard is somewhat incongruent with some of the internal island health messaging.

To reduce the risks of viral transmission and maintain physical distancing protocols, Island Health is employing virtual technology to connect with patients/clients, colleagues and partners, where appropriate to do so.

Will students that have face to face contact with patients be back in Island Health in September?

Island Health is alignment with both the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Advanced Education and Training that practice education (i.e. clinical practicum) continues in a proactive planned approach to ensure the future of the province's health system workforce. The approach will ensure the safety of all involved in the practice education programs, including students, faculty, Island Health staff, patients and families. Students from across many health disciplines are currently part of our care teams today and will be at Island Health facilities in September as well to provide direct care to enable completion of the necessary competencies to successfully complete their education program.

The following are the safety principles incorporated across the province for students and faculty:

- 1) Prior to arriving at an Island Health facility a daily Self-Assessment will be conducted before each practice education shift;*
- 2) Promoting that they stay home when they are sick and*
- 3) Providing pandemic education and resources to support care (e.g. clinical care/IPC guidelines).*

The Professional Practice Student Practice Team is here to support both Island Health teams and our Post Secondary Institutions (PSI), you can contact the team by emailing studentpractice@viha.ca.

PUBLIC HEALTH/MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER

Servers and Masks:

For restaurants, pubs, etc., why wouldn't the PHO include making masks mandatory for servers? AND Why are wait staff in pubs not wearing masks? They don't distance and go table to table.

To read more about the expectations and protocols for restaurants, cafes, pubs and nightclubs, please visit the [WorksafeBC website](#).

Are there any new updates on the potential vaccine and timeline of availability?

There are 27 human trials of potential vaccines underway and 138 waiting to get into the clinical testing phase. We don't know how effective these trials will be and how long the immunity will last. Lots of work to be done. The New York Times provided a great piece about tracking vaccine progress [here](#).

IH call centre wait times is long (2 hours). My concern is the public will get frustrated/not get tested, how is this being addressed?

On Monday, July 26th, our call centre received 888 calls, which is almost 4-times the normal call volume, and we also had technical issues with the phone lines making wait times very long. The phone lines are working normally again and we are actively recruiting staff to meet this increasing demand. You can help by encouraging everyone to use the [self-assessment tool](#) first, which may eliminate the need to call if you/they don't meet the eligibility criteria. Thank you for your patience.

What is the difference between calling 811 and 1-844-901-8442, if you are a staff member with exposure or symptoms?

811 can confirm whether one is eligible for testing, but then they still have to call the 1-844 number to book a test. Sharing the 1-844 number with staff eliminates the need to call 811, reducing that step in the process.

Bonnie Henry says physical distancing better than wearing mask all day at school. Tell me how you plan to physically distance kids for real, come September.

Plans to maintain physical distancing will be the responsibilities of schools, utilizing a variety of tactics (smaller learning groups, masks for older children, barriers if required, etc.). All boards of education and independent school authorities will continue to be required to implement a suite of health and safety measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, following the current guidelines from the BC CDC. Read more here: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0040-001415>

When will antibody testing be made available?

Serological testing to investigate immune response to COVID-19 infection is not yet available for broad clinical use in B.C. The most recent announcement of Health Canada's authorization of the first COVID-19 antibody test for use in Canada is a further important step to allow for the creation of a provincial antibody testing framework. For more information, [see the BCCDC website](#).

INFECTION PREVENTION & CONTROL/PPE

Why no enforcement of social distancing or mask wearing amongst staff. It's just a question of time before we have an outbreak amongst staff. This is critical.

There is still an expectation that staff wear a mask within 2 meters of any patient/client/resident, and when unable to physically distance from others in the work place. Leaders across Island Health have a responsibility for safe facilities and we need to be visible and coach staff to maintain distance and/or wear masks where this is not possible.

Visitor Masks:

Your response to "why no masks" was positively February. We need MANDATORY MASKS - Staff and visitors. Let's try to be proactive. Costco can do it, why not IH? **AND Is IH ready to go with a 'mandatory mask indoors' directive at a moments notice? That would bring some peace because it feels like we aren't even considering it.**

Outside of our emergency departments, we are not asking asymptomatic clients/patients to wear a mask. Patients are being screened for risk of COVID-19 (often numerous times). Staff are required to wear a mask if they are within 2 meters of a patient/client or cannot physically distance from others. Staff wearing masks provides protection for both patient and the wearer from large droplet transmission. If a client/patient requests a mask, please provide them with a mask. A decision to move to universal mask usage will be determined by the Provincial Health Officer, Ministry of Health and Health Authorities, based on viral load in our communities.

Can we please get a clear(er) answer to last week's question masks CO2 retention? Lots of misinformation. Need answers, not a referral to the BCCDC website.

There is no risk of hypercapnia (CO2 retention) in healthy adults who use face coverings, including medical and cloth face masks, as well as N95s. Individuals with severe COPD may experience some CO2 retention and shortness of breath from prolonged mask use.

What is the average wait time for a test in Victoria? How does that compare to earlier on in the pandemic?

Typically, the maximum wait time to access a COVID-19 test is two days after contacting the call centre – and most can be done the same day or within a day of initial contact. The average turnaround time for COVID-19 test results in Island Health is 18 hours, below the provincial average.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

Staffing:

We have many requests for 24-hour care in the community to unload acute care. There are not enough CHWs to accept these clients. AND What is IH doing to recruit Community Health Workers? Can we work with WorkBC to train unemployed workers as the demands from acute to CHS increase?
Community health services are a critical part of the continuum to support clients and families to receive care they need in the home. Significant work is underway to improve access to home care and home support, including focussed recruitment and retention efforts of CHW2s in particular. To support recruitment and retention, we are working to provide more consistent and flexible scheduling options to CHWs as well as strengthening the ongoing educational support offered to ensure they have the tools to provide safe care.

Why are Community Health Workers continuing to go to “one time” only clients & our regular clients getting new workers? Shouldn’t we be having MORE consistency?

Continuity of care providers is a key element of client centred care in the home. Every effort is made to schedule CHWs consistently. Some factors affecting this are: availability, client specific care needs/training requirements, client preference and requests for schedule changes and geographic location. As we address our recruitment challenges and implement service improvements, care provider continuity is expected to improve.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Will plans for managing capacity be made available for staff? Does it include opening 5 south at RJH?

Surge capacity planning is underway for the Province and Island Health. Plans will be shared with staff once finalized. 5South at RJH will be available for operationalization in September should we need it.

When are Adult Day Programs going to open (understanding that they will have to look different)?

We are awaiting MOH approval before we can reopen. ADPs have been working to prepare for a limited opening, and will be ready to go once the direction from MOH is clear.

OPERATIONS & SUPPORT

Let’s change the (continually empty) hand sani dispensers to a universal wall mount dispenser mount that can be refilled. Why is not done?

Demand on the global supply chain has affected supply of alcohol-based hand rubs, and currently there is a shortage of refills for our wall mounted stations; however, alternative products, and our regular supply of other sizes, remain available. Unfortunately, the supply available does not support another type of dispenser. We have begun to receive limited supply of product for the wall mounted stations, though supply is expected to remain limited in the near term. Having alcohol-based hand rub readily available where it is needed is key to maintaining and improving hand hygiene, and units are encouraged to order additional supply of the sizes (50ml, 400ml, 1000ml) that work best for their area. Create a standard spot for sanitizer in your unit/area to make hand sanitizer as accessible as possible.

Has our health authority started procurement of reusable face shields (without foam) or respirators in preparation of a second surge?

Island Health has worked with local partner organizations to ensure availability of reusable face shields, and has secured a stockpile in advance of any surge in requirement. If face shields are required in your area, please follow the current process for ordering PPE in your area, or have the person managing your PPE contact processimprovement@viha.ca. Together with PHSA, Island Health is actively managing respirators to ensure current and future availability. This includes deployment of elastomeric respirators where appropriate, fit testing and deployment of new models according to a plan developed provincially with Occupational Health & Safety, and continued procurement efforts to build and sustain supply.

I don't see any extra cleaning initiatives happening. Have we simply given up? No masks, no extra cleaning. Is this Island Unhealth?

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Island Health's housekeeping departments increased cleaning and disinfection practices in clinical and common (high patient/public traffic) areas at all hospital sites and LTC facilities. This included a second cleaning, with a focus on high-touch areas (i.e. handrails, door handles, nursing stations, public washrooms, etc). These increased cleaning practices have not changed and will remain in place. If you're referring to a specific area/site please contact Janice.Evans@viha.ca.

Any updates on the e-bike thing?

Parking Services is seeking your input [via a survey](#). Also noteworthy, an announcement was made by the BC Government about rebates to help those who want an electric-powered bike so they can move away from a vehicle. Read more [here](#).

Can we please get some gloves for schedulers to use at GRH?

In order to ensure sustainable supply, all PPE orders are vetted and reviewed according to the current [PPE use guidelines](#) for your area of work, and any specific requirements for the area submitting the order. Noting that some sizes of gloves currently remain in limited supply, please speak with your manager about the PPE needs for your area, what PPE is required and appropriate, and submitting an order according to the current practice for your unit as appropriate under current guidelines.

Why do we continue to have PHSA short CHS services on PPE such as gloves? Will we have the PPE supply chain secured to help with protecting workers and clients?

The unprecedented draw on PPE due to COVID-19 has created interruptions and fluctuations within global supply chains. PHSA continues to be active in sourcing products that meet required standards, and have been able to secure a large commitment for gloves. Although it is anticipated that this will stabilize supply in the near future, there is not yet a set timeline and we may continue to see limited availability of certain sizes in the short-term.

Will airflow in health units be looked at? Many of us work in an office without access to a window.

Island Health's health units are usually located in a leased building owned by a 3rd party. Although classed as a Health Care Facility under the Canadian Standards Association, the airflow or air exchange requirements are less strenuous than those required in an acute hospital or out patient clinic. If a staff member feels that airflow is insufficient, particularly if there's no option of opening a window, staff should submit an FMO work request to have the issue investigated.