

Rising COVID-19 Caseload in Island Health & Omicron Variant



Yesterday, we recorded our highest total active caseload (717 cases) since the start of the pandemic. At more than 9%, our test positivity rate is the highest in the province. Daily cases in Island Health have increased by 29% in the past week – and by 252% in South Island. Much of this South Island increase can largely be linked to a cluster of cases involving large social university gatherings. It is important to note that these cases are occurring within a highly vaccinated population, and as such, we are currently only seeing mild illness and are not aware of any hospitalizations associated with this cluster at this time. It is also important to emphasize that initial epidemiological data confirms that transmission is occurring in indoor households or social settings where few, if any COVID-19 controls are in place.

We are also learning more about the Omicron variant. The approved vaccines are proving effective at preventing severe disease, and booster doses are showing increased protection against this variant. Most concerning is that Omicron is more highly transmissible. While it took the Delta variant a couple of months to become the dominant strain in BC – we expect Omicron to only take a few weeks, just as we are seeing in other jurisdictions. And even though illness from Omicron is less severe in our highly vaccinated population – the sheer number of anticipated cases has the potential to have a significant impact on our hospitals. As such, system planning is underway to ensure we can manage that challenge at Island Health and across BC. As of December 14th, 44 confirmed Omicron cases in BC, with an age range of five to 72 years old.

COVID-19 pediatric clinics are up and running in the Island Health region. Parents can register their children for vaccination using the website www.getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca, which will also prompt an opportunity to book an appointment. In total 52 Island Health pharmacies are booking appointments for anyone 12 and older – for first, second or booster doses. Another 28 pharmacies will start scheduling appointments this week – and more in the near future. Registrants will see participating pharmacy information when they receive the invite to book their appointment.

Island Health Region Total Vaccines Administered To Date	% Population Immunized (12+) 2nd Dose To Date	% Population Immunized (5+) 2nd Dose To Date	% Population Immunized (18+) Two Doses & Boosters To Date
1,515, 986	90.4%	84.5%	14.2%

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Expression of Interest for Delivering COVID-19 Vaccines

- Are you a physician, nurse practitioner or midwife, who is interested in joining Island Health's COVID-19 immunization team? We are also interested in hearing from current or recently retired (within past 3-years) professionals willing to play a variety of roles within our COVID-19 immunization clinics, in communities across Island Health. We could really use your help to vaccinate people who are eager and have booked their appointment. Please express your interest by completing the [survey](#). Time commitment and locations are flexible, so please indicate your preferences when applying. Questions can also be submitted directly to MLCOVID19@viha.ca.
- *NOTE: If you have already identified your interest through a previous process, the Division of Family Practice, the Doctors of BC, or are a retired physician who has been in contact with Island Health's Medical Affairs Department, you do not need to re-apply.*

Register for a Priority Booster Dose

- In late October 2021, the COVID-19 Booster program was announced to offer the best protection from COVID-19 and its variants. Booster vaccine eligibility is based on risk, similar to the roll out of Dose 1, and priority groups are aligned with the recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.
- Community health-care providers, and staff who work in specific settings, are a priority for a booster shot – **under Categories 4 and 5**. Booster invites for these groups will be shared out before the end of January – or at 182 days after their second dose (if vaccinated later in the year). The benefit of self identifying is you won't have to wait for your age cohort, who may wait longer than 6 months, based on vaccine availability and roll-out.
- If you have not yet self-identified as a health-care worker/staff for a booster dose, please do so today. Please ensure you are registered in the www.getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca system, and then self-identify using this link: <https://www.getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca/s/d3-target-self-identification>. Your specific access code is: **H3962N!** (note: include the exclamation point). Please do not share this code further – and proof of ID will be required at immunization sites.
- If you have any trouble with the self-ID process, please call 1-833-838-2323 for support. Please wait for your invite. Drop-ins for booster doses are not permitted.

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- Vaccination continues to be our number one protective measure to decrease the burden on the population from severe COVID-19 disease, hospitalization, and death.
 - Rolling 7-day average of daily case counts in the region remains stable and undulating between 50-80 cases since early August.
 - Most severe infections are occurring in unvaccinated individuals; COVID-19 continues to be a mild illness in children.

[Post-Covid-19 Recovery Clinic](#)

- Island Health is opening a new outpatient clinic in early 2022 called the Post COVID-19 Recovery Clinic (PCRC) at Royal Jubilee Hospital. The program is a sister clinic of the four already functioning PCRC programs on the mainland. This clinic will offer both in-person and virtual care to all Vancouver Island patients suffering from chronic symptoms lasting more than 12 weeks after their acute infectious COVID-19 episode. The referral form is available on Pathways and is **NOT** for cases requiring urgent care.

[Clinical Practice Guide for the Use of Sotrovimab in Patients with COVID-19](#)

- Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody that neutralizes the spike protein of the SARS-COV-2 virus, preventing entry into human cells and replication. Sotrovimab is active against variants of concern Alpha to Delta. It is not yet known if Sotrovimab is able to neutralize the new variant of concern Omicron.
- Island Health is currently developing processes to provide this treatment to eligible and interested patients; more information about this will be coming in the near future.

[Influenza Vaccine Order Form – Vaccine Still Available](#)

- Encouraging your patients to get a flu shot is particularly important this year to help them stay healthy while COVID-19 continues to circulate in our communities. This year influenza vaccination is **free of charge for everyone in BC 6 months and older**. Public Health still has influenza vaccine available to order. If your office requires influenza vaccine please submit a Vaccine Order Form to your local Public Health Unit. More details are available on the [Island Health Website for Community Vaccine Providers](#), including information about [Planning Influenza Clinics for Primary Care Providers](#).

Island Health New Harm Reduction Policy – Coming Soon

- Island Health is in the final stages of developing a new Harm Reduction Policy, which was in response to the expressed needs of staff and due to the countless stories of people accessing care at Island Health who deserved better treatment as a result of their reported or suspected substance use.
 - Log-on and visit the [Harm Reduction Intranet page](#) for education and learning resources.
 - Take the [Harm Reduction 101](#) module on Learning Hub.

[Deloitte Report: Understanding the Health Care Impacts of the Pandemic](#)

- A new study commissioned by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) looks at seven health indicators to gauge access to care during the pandemic and the potential impact of the pandemic on the health care system and on the wellness of Canadians.

[Past Issues of the Island Health Primary Care Update](#)

The Island Health Archive for past issues of the Primary Care Update.

LINKS, RESOURCES & FAQs

BCCDC Resources:

- [New Today](#): This section of the website highlights the latest guidance documents and updates to the website for health professionals.
- [About the vaccines](#)
- [Resources for Health Professionals](#)
- [Reporting adverse events](#)

Doctors of BC:

- [Info for doctors getting or giving the vaccine](#)
- [Updated toolkit for doctors' offices](#)

Frequently Asked Questions:

- [ImmunizeBC FAQ](#)