

Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer

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AFTER HOURS ON CALL

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September 8, 2021

Dear Primary Care Providers and Other Physicians:

As we continue in Phase 3 of [BC's Restart plan](#), and look to transitioning to Phase 4 over the fall months, the Island Health Medical Health Officers offer this update to Primary Care Providers. The team in public health and pandemic preparedness have been working very hard to “right-size” the response elements to the evolving pandemic. With the arrival of an effective vaccine, high population vaccine uptake and normalization of COVID 19 as an endemic virus, a number of anticipated changes are underway:

- **Mass vaccination clinics** are transitioning to more [appropriate sized clinics](#) for the required workflows. Teams are actively planning for [outreach clinics at community settings](#) throughout the region. More information will be forthcoming regarding “third dose” COVID 19 primary vaccinations and booster doses when it becomes available.
- **Test collection sites** [remain active across the region](#) for appropriate test referrals, based on symptoms according to the [BCCDC testing guidance](#).
- **Positive cases and their contacts** are followed up in accordance with the [BCCDC Interim Guidance for Case and Contact Management](#). Given our now high immunization coverage rate public health is prioritizing follow up of cases in priority settings, such as clusters, healthcare, daycares, schools, and congregate living settings. Fully vaccinated contacts are no longer asked to self isolate but to rather self monitor for symptoms.
- We anticipate **updated COVID-19 case reporting** that shifts to representing immunization status and severity of illness. With a highly vaccinated population, there is a decoupling of case numbers and severity of disease. More relevant and timely [reporting of hospitalizations and other severe outcomes](#), as related to the definitive intervention, vaccination, is a change that will reduce population anxiety and encourage ‘learning to live again’ with respiratory viruses.
- **Updated testing strategies** are anticipated for the fall respiratory season as [surveillance reveals](#) more common viruses being detected and that, with an effective vaccine, it is not necessary to have knowledge of all community cases of COVID 19. We need to prepare for testing guidance that emphasizes clinically significant or severe presentations.
- Concerted efforts are underway within the region to strengthen COVID-19 Positive **lab notification for Primary Care Providers** with enhanced information for patient and provider, acknowledging that the winter respiratory season will still see significant numbers of patients being tested at test collection sites.

- As emphasized by the PHO, the Ministry and the [CPSBC Registrar](#), **timely in person clinical care for patients** is as important as ever. If necessary, individuals who are positive for COVID 19 can be seen and [managed safely](#) in community clinics to assess their clinical status and need for higher levels of care. Patients who require higher levels of care due to worsening symptoms should be seen in urgent and emergency care settings.
- **Infection prevention and control** [guidance for primary care](#) and [all other settings](#) has been updated, including refreshing the access for supplies of Personal Protective Equipment through the [Health PPE portal](#). Based on the pandemic experience in acute and long term care, appropriate use of PPE, and broad vaccination coverage, have been extremely effective in protecting healthcare workers who have compassionately cared for COVID positive patients in their facilities across the regions.
- **Island Health leaders are exploring additional supports** for primary care to support the transition back to viral presentations as a part of routine community clinical assessments. Workflows have been prepared for primary care providers to support symptomatic patients. The [health care mask mandate](#) continues in place to support providers.
- **Exemptions for masks or vaccines** may be requested of you as a provider. You should be aware that there are very few reasons for mask or vaccine exemptions. The Provincial Health Officer's office will be assessing requests for vaccine exemptions as they arise. In most circumstances, medically indicated exemptions to the vaccine, are quite rare, and generally determined after a first dose of the vaccine has been administered.
- **School leaders in K-12 and Post Secondary**, are planning for full return to school with additional precautions in mask mandates, deployment of the Rapid Response Teams for schools, and a focus on [mental wellness and recovery for schools](#). Planning is underway for School-based Immunization clinics, for both COVID 19 and other vaccines, and recovery of other school based programs for the school year. Further information on COVID 19 vaccines for ages 6-11 will be coming later in the fall.

We recognize that it is a major adjustment to transition our response from pandemic to endemic virus in a vaccinated population on the tailwinds of this traumatizing year. As Medical Health Officers, we are confident the vaccine is highly safe and effective, but yet community members may remain fearful and unaccepting of some advice. A communication tool of top facts is provided to help with clinical discussions in your settings.

Thank you again for your amazing and persistent dedication to your patients and your population and for your partnership throughout this new work. The important change in the pandemic since the onset of vaccine is remarkable and worthy of highlighting our expectations, as Medical Health Officers, for the effectiveness of vaccinations as a critical intervention to restore our communities' wellness and agency to create a stronger future into 2022.

Please continue your excellent work in communicating the importance of vaccination to your patients. Anyone can walk into any of our vaccination sites and be vaccinated for first or second dose, it could literally save their life.

In health,



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Chief Medical Health Officer



Murray Fyfe, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer



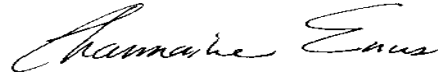
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Covid-19: The Facts

Island Health's cumulative case incidence is ~5.5x times lower than that of Canada overall - over the course of the entire pandemic to date (707 cases per 100,000 for VIHA vs 3,884 cases per 100,000 for Canada overall).

Island Health's hospitalization rate is the lowest in of all health authorities BC over the course of the entire pandemic to date.

Island's case fatality rate is ~2.5 times lower than that of Canada overall, over the course of the entire pandemic to date (0.71% for Island Health compared to 1.8% for Canada overall).

Only 0.04% of residents of Island Health that have been fully vaccinated have gone on to become COVID-19 cases. Those that have had generally had mild course of illness.

Vaccine breakthrough cases resulted in transmission (symptomatic infection) in only 3.45% of high risk contacts.

Within Island Health there are no indications yet of waning immunity based on the analysis of time intervals between vaccination and episode date for breakthrough cases.

There have been no COVID-19 hospitalizations among children under 12 in Island Health since the start of the pandemic.

Island Health's cumulative case incidence is the lowest of all health authorities in BC over the course of the entire pandemic to date.

During the 2020/2021 school year, of the 116 school exposures that occurred, only 7% of these exposures resulted in school transmission.

Recent work has shown the vaccine to be >80% effective against symptomatic infection and 95% effective against hospitalization and severe illness with delta variant.

New research out of the UK (published in the Lancet) has shown that adults who are fully vaccinated are 49% less likely to have long COVID than the unvaccinated should they contract a COVID-19 infection.

