

March 13, 2020 – 7:13 p.m.



All-staff bulletin

PHSA's weekly novel coronavirus (COVID-19) update

Sent on behalf of Dr. Réka Gustafson, Vice President of Public Health & Wellness and Deputy Provincial Health Officer

The global situation surrounding COVID-19 is changing daily. As of this afternoon, there are 11 new confirmed cases, bringing us to a total of 64 cases in B.C.

Even since this afternoon's town hall, the information has changed. New updates that supersede the town hall information are below in red.

Further, we need to acknowledge that with the rate of change, updates today may openly contradict information available yesterday. We appreciate this is stressful and difficult to plan around, but it reflects the reality of how nimble we must be in this rapidly changing environment to ensure our staff and physicians have the most up to date information.

At this time, our Provincial Health Officer (PHO) is still recommending against **all non-essential travel** outside of Canada, including to the United States. Restricting travel, especially right before Spring Break, gives us an opportunity to slow down the spread of the virus, protect vulnerable people and prevent a large spike in cases that could stress our communities and our health care system. Effective ways to prevent transmission are good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, staying home if you are sick, and practicing social distancing.

The dedication and professionalism of our workforce is making a meaningful difference. I'm confident this will help us get through this challenging time.

Today's virtual town hall

The recording of today's all-staff, virtual town hall can be [viewed online](#) (you do not need access to POD to view this). To expedite access, the recording is unedited. Below, you will

find time stamps for each of the questions answered during the town hall. Continue to watch for updates from PHSA, as the information is changing daily.

Hot topics

Travel:

If you're contemplating travel, we strongly encourage you to consider the impact your potential absence could have on operations. Currently, Health Canada and the PHO are advising that you avoid non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice and those who do travel outside of Canada are being asked to self-isolate at home.

However, as of late this afternoon, the direction is that 14 day self-isolation upon return from travel outside of Canada does NOT apply to health care workers (this includes all PHSA employees and medical staff), unless they have travelled to Hubei province in China, Italy or Iran. For those who have travelled to Hubei province in China, Italy or Iran, they will be placed on paid general leave for the duration of the mandatory self-isolation.

Asymptomatic health care workers and medical staff are expected to attend work as scheduled following any other international travel, and they are required to self-monitor for flu-like symptoms.

If they develop symptoms, they should self-isolate and contact their health care provider or 8-1-1 to arrange for assessment. If they develop symptoms while providing care, they should immediately put a mask, finish any essential services they are providing and self-isolate.

Specific pay guidelines:

BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS): BCEHS differs from most other health care employers in that employees have access a Short-Term Illness and Injury Plan (STIIP), a 75% wage replacement, as opposed to a sick leave bank (100% wage replacement). As such, a unique approach must be taken with this group to mitigate the risk that employees will be financially motivated to attend work despite exhibiting symptoms of the COVID-19 virus.

Accordingly, BCEHS employees who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or have tested positive for the virus, will be placed on a general paid leave of absence until they are no

longer symptomatic and/or are cleared to return to work by a qualified medical practitioner. This approach not only allows ill employees to get well, but also protects staff and patients.

Physicians: For physicians who are employees, the staff guidelines will apply. For physicians who are contractors or fee for service, please check with Doctors of BC for your options under the PMA or the Physician Disability Insurance plan.

Non-employees (contractors) or those that for other reasons do not qualify for sick leave: The Canadian government has announced that it will allow workers who are either in quarantine or who have been directed to self-isolate to claim Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits without having to wait through the mandatory one-week waiting period, so they can be paid for the first week of their claim.

Vacation carry-over:

For employees covered by collective agreements, you will follow the collective agreements unless a temporary contract interpretation is issued stating otherwise.

For non-contract employees, if you are working directly on COVID-19 and have 2019 vacation days that expire at the end of March that you are unable to use, we will extend up to 75 hours of vacation to be used before December 31, 2020.

- *Vacation carry-over – at approximately **1 hour 8:40 minutes***

Sick time:

To minimize pressures on the health care system, we will not be requiring doctors' notes to substantiate the sick leave.

- *BCEHS sick time – at approximately **35:20 minutes***
- *Physicians sick time – at approximately **36:00 minutes***
- *Contractors etc. sick time – at approximately **36:30 minutes***

Over-time:

For unionized employees, the terms of the collective agreement apply.

For non-contract employees working on COVID-19, since this is an extraordinary event, we will be allowing non-contract staff who meet [the criteria](#) the opportunity accrue overtime without it impacting their ability to also earn CTO time.

- *Overtime – at approximately **41:41 minutes***

Business continuity & working from home:

We are actively working on our business continuity planning. As part of that, we'll be identifying groups that may be able to work from home. We are looking at a number of

factors including the nature of their work, their ability to work from home and the technology required for them to do so.

- *Business continuity – at approximately 40:45 minutes*

Informing teams about colleagues with COVID-19:

“If you need to know, you will know.”

It is not the manager’s responsibility to identify staff members who have confirmed cases of COVID-19 to other staff members. If an individual on your team has a confirmed case of COVID-19, the manager will be given advice on what information should be shared with other employees from the occupational health and safety team, infection control and public health.

- *Communicable disease exposure at work – at approximately 47:20 minutes*

Occupational health nurses:

We are increasing our coverage of occupational health nurses to support PHSA employees. If you are not receiving the answers you require from 8-1-1 or from the Provincial Workplace Health Call Centre, you can reach them at workplacehealth@phsa.ca or 604-875-7244. Monitoring will soon take place 7 days a week, 7 a.m. – 4 p.m.

- *Occupational health nurses – at approximately 42:18 minutes*

Self-care:

As health care workers, we have an important role to play – but we are also being asked to balance our own personal needs and the needs of our families, while still working to care for our patients. Please practice self-care, and continue to refer to reliable and trusted sources of information.

- *Self-care - at approximately 43:15 minutes*

SLIDO ANSWERS:

Are there any plans to pre-emptively allow staff to work remotely (where workflows allow) to prevent transmission of the virus? 45:30 mins

What kind of financial coverage will the employee (both part-time/casual and full-time) get if isolation is required due to contraction of COVID-19 at work? 48:12 mins

If a staff member reveals they tested positive for COVID-19, what is the manager's responsibility to inform staff working with this person? Any privacy issues? 46:40 mins

Under what circumstances should a staff member self-isolate? What do we currently know about one's ability to spread the virus while being asymptomatic? 49:45 mins

If staff members are returning from vacation and self-isolate, will it be considered as paid sick leave? 52:10 mins

Many staff have school-aged children. In the event of school closures what are the plans for possibly working from home in order to look after our children too? Will the families need to self-isolate? 53:05 mins

When will wide scale testing begin in BC? Will there be drive through testing available? Will PHSA sites have testing available for employees/contractors? 54:10 mins

What's realistically the threshold for when you should self-quarantine and request a test? How ill/what symptoms should you feel before you do it? 58:45 mins

What should you do if you as an employee are fine, but a family member has general illness-like symptoms? 56:35 mins

Are there any preparations (if need be) to ensure Citrix/Remote-desktop access can support a high volume of employees working from home? 57:45 mins

If you get a cold that you're sure is NOT COVID-19, and nevertheless self-isolate, when can you return to work? As soon as you feel well? Do you need to be tested? 1 hr

If someone has fully recovered from COVID-19, is their immunity now compromised? Can they catch the virus again if they get exposed to it after recovering? 1 hr 2:45 mins

What are the risks taking public transport to work as there are few possible community spread cases? 1 hr 1:10 mins

Can you please comment on recent news reports that state up to 70% of the Canadian population could become infected with COVID-19? 1 hr 3:30 mins

What would happen if some staff refused to work in workplaces? 1 hr 6:05 mins

If the acute sites are overwhelmed, will non-clinical staff or management be called to help out at acute sites for continuity of patient care? Is there a potential plan/process for this? 1 hr 7:52 mins

Your sources of information:

Please continue to watch for further updates.

- Continue to visit the [BC Centre for Disease Control's](#) website.
- While our understanding and our response to the COVID-19 outbreaks evolve, we will be sending weekly updates to PHSA staff. Please find the previous Friday all-staff bulletins with updates on COVID-19 in the [coronavirus resources section](#) on POD.
- An Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been activated for all of PHSA. You can see the [structure on POD](#).
- BCEHS alerts and updates are on the [BCAS intranet](#) and in the [BCEHS Handbook](#). [Note: you must be on the respective PHSA and BCEHS networks to access these links].
- 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.

