

Critical COVID-19 News

Information for employees, medical staff, paramedics and contractors

March 21 at 4:05 p.m.

*Sent on behalf of Dr. Maureen O'Donnell & Susan Wannamaker
Chief medical officer and chief operating officer of PHSA's COVID-19 EOC*

We are all part of the global effort to fight the spread of COVID-19. Across PHSA, everyone's role – whether they provide direct patient care or they are in a supporting role – is vital.

We have PHSA team members across the entire province working to support and care for fellow citizens under very difficult circumstances. We continue to extend our sincere, heartfelt gratitude for your ongoing efforts.

Our daily bulletins contain the latest workforce information. **Please read them carefully.**

Highlights:

Breaking news from government:

1. **New order to close personal service establishments**
2. **B.C. government taking steps to protect the most vulnerable**

Other important updates:

3. **Updated advice: What to do when you have mild respiratory symptoms**
4. **Updated advice: Reduced time for self-isolation following resolution of symptoms**
5. **Security of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies**
6. **Changes to retail food service**
7. **Advice on working from home**
8. **Bookmark this: New COVID-19 resource line from Workplace Health**
9. **Privacy and process still matter – why PHSA will not publicly confirm staff cases**

New order to close personal service establishments

- Today the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and Health Minister recapped the situation across B.C. and highlighted the importance of paying attention to changing conditions.
- The [PHO issued a new order](#) that personal service establishments, such as salons, spas, massage, and tattoo parlors, must close until further notice as they required direct contact.
- PHO Dr. Bonnie Henry also discussed the strategy behind what public health is tracking – emphasizing that it is about more than just testing numbers. She stressed that it is important to watch very closely the onset of illness and that B.C. will begin to see this decrease if the measures we are taking are working (even if the number of reported cases continues to rise, short-term).

- Dr. Henry also spoke to the testing strategy in B.C. and the evidence-based wisdom of focusing on high-risk populations – and how this changes at various points in an outbreak.
- Health Minister Adrian Dix emphasized that the social distancing measures introduced this week require “100% participation, 100% commitment and 100% compliance.”

B.C. government taking steps to protect the most vulnerable

- The Province also [announced today](#) it is taking swift action to protect vulnerable people, including those experiencing homelessness, in communities around B.C. Initial actions include:
 - a ban on evictions for non-payment of rent in BC Housing-funded buildings;
 - the development of distinct protocols and identification of sites to support isolation for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness – sheltered or unsheltered – and those in private single room occupancy (SROs) and social housing buildings;
 - sustaining service providers through continued payments to ensure they can pay their staff and operating costs; and
 - centralized procurement for critical supplies needed by frontline providers in the housing sector, including gloves and cleaning products.

Updated advice: What to do when you have mild respiratory symptoms

- We must take measures to help flatten the curve, and in light of this our **updated advice** is that we will approach even mild respiratory illness symptoms with an abundance of caution.
- With this in mind, health care workers who develop any kind of **respiratory symptoms** shouldn't be at work.
- If you develop mild symptoms while you are working, put on a mask, finish what you are doing, and assess whether the symptoms are new and possibly due to a respiratory infection. If so, get tested and go home.
- We appreciate that it is allergy season and there could be a number of factors contributing to mild respiratory symptoms. We must balance caution with common sense and a health care worker's ability to differentiate between symptoms of a respiratory infection versus other causes, such as seasonal allergies.
- If you believe you are experiencing mild respiratory symptoms akin to seasonal allergies, it is appropriate to wear a mask and stay at work. If you are unsure about the likely cause of your symptoms, get tested and go home.
- To support our staff we've made testing more easily available to health care workers and have a 24-hour turnaround on health care worker test results.
- Testing sites are available in all regions of the province – [including at C&W](#) – and all sites are available to all health care workers, no matter where they work.
- To ensure expedited testing, make sure your sample and requisition get labelled as **Health Care Worker (label as “HCW”)**.

Updated advice: Reduced time for self-isolation following resolution of symptoms

- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has issued updated advice about when to return to work following periods of self-isolation due to illness and/or international travel. This advice is supported by B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer. **What follows supersedes all previous guidance.**
- For those employees, physicians and paramedics who are continuing to report to their normal places of work because it has been deemed essential for them to do so to provide direct patient care and/or to support those providing direct patient care, these PHAC guidelines apply to you when returning to work:

- **Following illness:** The time required for self-isolation of cases (confirmed or clinical) where symptoms have resolved **has been reduced to 10 days** from the onset of symptoms (infectious period).
 - After 10 days, if your temperature is normal and you feel well, you can return to routine activities.
 - Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean you need to continue to self-isolate beyond 10 days.
 - On day 10, if you continue to have symptoms other than a cough, please continue self-isolating until symptoms have resolved.
 - Please seek medical care if respiratory symptoms worsen.
- **Following international travel:** The time required for self-isolation of returning travellers or contacts **remains at 14 days** (incubation period).
 - Returning travellers who develop respiratory symptoms within 14 days of return will be considered “clinical COVID-19” cases and their contacts managed in the same way as laboratory confirmed cases.
- All of the above advice should be considered in the context of PHSA’s recent directive to support as many employees as possible to work from home. Meaning, if you are an employee who is already working from home, this advice about when to return to the workplace does not apply.

Security of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies

- You may have noticed that, across all direct care sites and within BCEHS, medical supplies are being stored in a different location or that different procedures are in place to obtain access to those supplies.
- In some locations, site leaders have put additional measures in place to actively manage and protect our inventory.
- We are doing this proactively, and consistently with other health authority partners across the province, to ensure our employees and physicians have adequate and appropriate supplies to do their jobs safely.
- Understanding exactly how to access supplies is important to maintaining safety and delivery of high quality care. Any new procedures or protocols will be communicated at the local level, but if you have questions or concerns, please speak to your manager or supervisor-in-charge.
- From a system-wide perspective, the Supply Chain team is working around-the-clock to source and purchase necessary supplies. The team is mindful of the need to strike a balance between easy access for staff and security of key supplies province-wide.

Changes to retail food service

- On March 20, [the PHO of B.C. ordered](#) that all eating establishments across the province stop providing dine-in services.
- In order to comply, effective immediately, **all hospital/direct care retail outlets with dedicated seating of more than 10 seats, are closed to the public and available for staff only.**
- On-site signage to this effect is forthcoming.
- PHSA appreciates that employees and physicians need respite. For as long as we are able under public health orders, we will maintain some measure of retail food operations and seating for health authority hospital personnel to access during their shifts.

Advice on working from home

1-800 audio conferencing:

- As we do our part to maintain social distancing, conference calls are an important tool to stay in touch and support timely decision-making.

- With citizens all across the province relying on voice communication, it's no surprise that demand is high; as a result, you may notice intermittent periods where quality and access are interrupted.
- PHSA's voice technology team advises that if you experience issues while using your audio conference bridge, **dial in using the 1-800 number option** you usually see identified in your call invites. This toll-free path is routed differently than local calls and may be a more reliable way to connect short-term.

Using Citrix responsibly:

- With many PHSA employees now working from home, our IMITS team offers the reminder that our Citrix capacity is based on concurrent usage.
- In order to ensure that this important resource remains available to perform the highest priority functions, we encourage you to limit the time you spend logged into Citrix. Please log in, perform your necessary tasks, and then promptly log out.
- Many thanks to the employees already doing this – you really are making a difference!

Bookmark this: New COVID-19 resource line from Workplace Health

- The new PHSA COVID-19 resource line – staffed by nurses – is for all PHSA employees and physicians to address workplace health-related calls regarding COVID-19 matters.
- This resource line will:
 - support workplace health related calls from employees and medical staff
 - triage calls and provide direction to various resources available
 - work closely with our infection control teams
- The resource line is: 1-833-875-2155 (toll free) or 604-875-2155.
- The operational hours are currently set to be 7 days per week from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Privacy and process still matter – why PHSA will not publicly confirm staff cases

- We care for some of the most vulnerable patients in the province and therefore, keeping our staff and physicians safe is vital.
- As the impacts of the spread of COVID-19 continue to be felt across British Columbia, it is inevitable that our care providers will, unfortunately, be exposed.
- While we do not comment on individual cases, we acknowledge that in the current environment there is great interest amongst staff and the public in the specific details.
- As health care professionals and leaders, we have extensive experience in dealing with complex situations and infectious diseases involving our facilities.
- We have processes in place to protect those directly impacted when an exposure occurs and we engage those systems to reduce the risk to our patients and other care providers. We communicate with staff and share medical concerns through huddles, 1:1 meetings and additional, direct follow-up as appropriate.
- We come from a place of transparency and respect for confidentiality and as such, we work directly with those impacted – including our employees, physicians, patients and family members – to ensure they are safe and supported, following our protocols for infection control within our facilities.
- We are living and working in extraordinary times, but it's important that we continue to honour the processes, practices and privacy regulations that serve us well in providing safe, high quality care every day.

Thank you for your continued dedication

The service that each and every one of you offers for our patients and families – and the essential support you provide to our provincial systems – is critical, and is making a meaningful difference in B.C.

Your ongoing sources of information

- We are sending daily updates. Watch for emails from phsacomm@phsa.ca.
- Continue to send in your questions via [Slido.com](https://www.slido.com) using the event code **#PHSATownHall**. 'Like' questions that are similar to yours to let us know the priority topics to cover at our virtual town halls and in future communications.
- Continue to check the [BCCDC's website](#) as a trusted source of information.
- We have opened up a [new staff COVID-19 section on phsa.ca](#) where employees can access the same information that is [posted on POD](#), but when off the network.
- BCEHS alerts and updates are on the [BCAS intranet](#) and in the [BCEHS Handbook](#). *[Note: you must be on the BCEHS network 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](#).