



Critical COVID-19 News

Information for employees, medical staff, paramedics and contractors

March 26 at 7:20 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 continue to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those working tirelessly – throughout PHSA and around the province – to respond to COVID-19. Please continue to look after each other, and after yourselves. You are all making a difference, and your ongoing efforts do not go unrecognized. Thank you for your continued commitment to serve British Columbia.

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

Highlights:

Breaking news from the provincial government:

- 1. Clarifying the federal government's mandatory 14-day quarantine**
- 2. B.C. issues orders under Emergency Program Act**
- 3. Clinical guidance to reduce risk for people during dual health emergencies**
- 4. New B.C. government support for seniors**

Other important updates:

- 1. Personal protective equipment (PPE) guidance**
- 2. Reminder: PHSA survey on child care concerns**
- 3. Reminder: testing guidelines**

4. Advice for pregnant health care workers

5. Mental health and psychosocial supports

Clarifying the federal government's mandatory 14-day quarantine

- Under the Quarantine Act, the government of Canada has imposed a mandatory 14-day quarantine on travellers returning from abroad. The mandatory quarantine came into effect midnight Wednesday. Anyone coming into the country at ports of entry will be asked to make a declaration.
- It's important to clarify that this 14-day quarantine still does not apply to essential health care workers. As noted in [previous bulletins](#), essential health care workers are permitted to return to work following international travel provided they are asymptomatic and wear a surgical mask for 14 days following travel.

B.C. issues orders under Emergency Program Act

- Government has [issued series of ministerial orders](#) to ensure a co-ordinated response to COVID-19 across all levels of government for the duration of the provincial emergency. These include:
 - **Supply chain:** Establishing a new Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit to co-ordinate goods and services distribution; taking a more active role in co-ordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail; and suspending any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day.
 - **Protecting consumers:** Banning the secondary resale of food, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, cleaning and other essential supplies; and restricting quantities of items purchased at point of sale.
 - **Enforcement:** Enabling municipal bylaw officers to support enforcement of the provincial health officer's orders for business closures and gatherings, in line with offences under the Public Health Act.
 - **Travel:** Ensuring all passenger and car-ferry services provide minimum service levels and priority access for residents, and essential goods and workers.
 - **Protecting B.C.'s most vulnerable:** Making it easier to support critical services for vulnerable people, like food banks and shelters.
 - **Co-ordination:** Suspending local states of emergency specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for the City of Vancouver; giving municipal councils the ability to hold more flexible meetings to expedite decisions; and co-ordinating potential use of local publicly owned facilities, like community centres, for self-isolation, testing, medical care, warehousing and distribution.

Clinical guidance to reduce risk for people during dual health emergencies

- The B.C. government [announced today](#) that, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and to respond to the ongoing overdose emergency in B.C., there is [new clinical guidance](#) from the British Columbia Centre on Substance Use. The guidance outlines steps that prescribers, pharmacists and care teams can take to support the provision of medications – including safe prescription alternatives to the illegal drug

supply – to be delivered directly to patients, along with telemedicine for clinical assessments.

- These guidelines indicate the use of prescription alternatives in addition to existing treatment options to prevent the risk associated with the toxic drug supply.

New B.C. government support for seniors

- The B.C. government announced today it is providing the United Way of the Lower Mainland with \$50 million to bolster seniors' supports at community service agencies. This will help address immediate needs associated with the impact of COVID-19, so seniors get the support they need to stay safe at home.
- The supports are the outcome of work conducted by an all-party COVID-19 Seniors Working Group co-chaired by Isobel Mackenzie, B.C.'s seniors advocate, and the ministry.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidance

- Further to [yesterday's bulletin](#), all health authorities, including representatives from PHSA's Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and PICNet met with the Ministry of Health to review the new PPE guidelines mid-afternoon today.
- Following that, our own PHSA IPAC physician and clinical leadership is preparing how we will roll the new guidelines out.
- On March 27, they will be meeting with all PHSA infection control physicians and clinical leaders to finalize the recommendations. These will then be presented to the programs, including to the Chief Medical Officers and their respective Emergency Operations Centres.
- All of us recognize the urgency to get this information out and we appreciate the efforts of many to be sure that this happens in an expedited fashion.
- Related to this, at this [morning's all-staff, virtual town hall](#), Dr. Réka Gustafson, our Vice President of Public Health & Wellness and Deputy Provincial Health Officer, provided important and reassuring context around this matter.
- Dr. Gustafson encouraged PHSA employees, physicians and paramedics to keep using PPE in an evidence-based manner consistent with infection prevention and control recommendations for their particular areas of direct patient care and the populations they serve. This advice was echoed by Dr. Laura Sauvé, a pediatric infectious disease specialist with BC Children's Hospital and a member of PHSA's Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) team.
- As soon as we have confirmed advice from the ministry, we will work with our program and infection control leaders to ensure clear direction for our specialized direct care providers.

- In the meantime, we encourage you to listen to some of the advice provided during today's all-staff town hall. The [recording can be viewed on our website](#).
- Please note in particular these questions posed and the time stamps for when they were answered:
 - Dr. Gustafson's general comments on PPE (at the 9:58 minute mark).
 - Why is there so much discrepancy in the PPE recommendations amongst health authorities? Are staff at risk are wearing more extensive PPE than we have been guided to? How can we address the fear that frontline clinicians currently have, as they don't feel adequately protected at work? (at the 40:59 minute mark).

Reminder: PHSA survey on child care concerns

- As noted in today's [Operational Update](#), PHSA is seeking to understand the impact of COVID-19 specifically on those members of our workforce with young and school-aged children who have child care concerns.
- We are working collaboratively with the B.C. government and our health sector partners on what potential solutions may look like.
- This survey will help us gauge the magnitude of the issue and the needs of our workforce. That said, we do not yet know what supports can be offered. We encourage parents to continue to plan and prepare for how they can manage their own child care needs.
- If you are concerned about your individual child care needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts on schools, day cares and child-minders/caregivers, [please take this survey](#) **by midnight tonight (March 26)**.
- Note: If you miss the survey window, this does not mean you won't be considered as we explore solutions. This survey will just help us determine the need. We will continue to keep you informed.

Reminder: testing guidelines

- Testing is available for all patients who need it, but not everyone requires a test.
- As a reminder, B.C. is currently testing those with respiratory symptoms who are:
 - Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized (this includes, but is not exclusive to, women in their third trimester of pregnancy, people receiving hemodialysis, people on active treatment for cancer, and those with conditions unrelated to COVID-19 that require them to be in hospital care frequently. None of these conditions need to be noted on the testing requisition; it is sufficient to note "HOSP" as indicated below)
 - Health care workers
 - Residents of long term care facilities
 - Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak
- To prioritize testing, the requisitions are labelled as coming from:

- Health Care Worker (label as HCW)
 - Hospital (label as HOSP)
 - Long-term care facility (label as LTCF)
- The latest testing guidelines are always available on the [lab testing section](#) of BCCDC's website.

Advice for pregnant health care workers

- We appreciate that pregnant health care workers may feel particularly concerned during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On March 25, the BCCDC and Ministry of Health issued a statement regarding COVID-19 and pregnancy.
- Pregnant women are no more at risk for acquiring the virus nor are they more at risk of getting severe disease than comparable aged adults.
- Pregnant women who are working in health care should continue to work if they are asymptomatic. As always, they should follow PPE precautions appropriate to their work environment.
- If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your manager or supervisor in charge.

Mental health and psychosocial supports

- We recognize and appreciate the concern, pressure and anxiety that many of our team members may be feeling, particularly when it comes to the role we, as health care workers, are playing in the COVID-19 response.
- We want you and your families to stay well. PHSA is offering a wide variety of programs to support you during COVID-19 including:
 - PHSA Staff Psychosocial Support Program (available for all staff): 604-875-2982 or workplacewellness@cw.bc.ca.
 - 24/7 Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP): 1-800-663-1142 or on the [Homeweb website](#).
 - PHSA COVID-19 Staff Resource Line: 1-833-875-2155
 - Self-care programs: Virtual meditation, fitness, articles, and webinars
- You can find more information about these programs and supports on the [Workplace Wellness](#) section of our website.

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](#).