

LATEST UPDATE – Dec. 9, 2020

In an effort to keep our community partners connected, we are providing you with regular COVID-19 updates.

Ministry of Health Update

In today's media availability on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, reported a total of 619 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours. The total number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in B.C. now stands at 39,337 since the start of the pandemic. There were 121 new cases reported in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region in the last day.

Across the province, 16 new deaths were confirmed, while 338 people are currently hospitalized, with 75 of these cases receiving treatment in ICU/critical care. The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 now stands at 559. There was 1 additional healthcare facility outbreak announced, while 2 were declared over. There are 57 active outbreaks in long-term care and assisted living facilities, and 8 in acute care settings.

Dr. Bonnie Henry Briefing

Provincial COVID-19 Vaccine Update

Dr. Henry, Dr. Brown, Incident Commander for the Immunize BC plan, and Health Minister Adrian Dix announced the details of their 'Operation Immunize' plan on the delivery and roll-out of vaccines across the province. The plan focuses on how B.C. will receive, distribute and immunize against COVID-19. Dr. Henry referred to today as an important day for British Columbians, discussing the vaccines that will save lives in B.C. and across Canada. She emphasized it will be the most complex and comprehensive immunization program ever to come to B.C.

Initial Vaccinations

The Pfizer vaccine will be the first to arrive next week and onwards. Appropriate freezers are readily available for their arrival. Initially, we will receive small batches across two locations. The first batch will be delivered to two locations in Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health regions. Once the roll-out progresses, greater batch sizes will arrive. In total, Dr. Henry anticipates there will be a total of 30 sites for the vaccines that will be run across the province, where adequate storage will be available to facilitate these vaccinations. She anticipates approximately 400,000 people can be covered by this immunization protocol by the end of March. Currently, we do not have enough vaccine to stop transmission across the province at this time. It is really important people to continue to follow PHO guidelines.

Dr. Henry warned that it will be a long road ahead. Eventually, we will all have access to the vaccine but this will take time. The first phase of the roll-out is focused on protecting as many people as possible. There is a process in place through the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) which identifies priority populations. BC also has an immunization committee composed of public health experts, pharmacists, ethicists and others, to map out priority populations specific to B.C. The focus is on saving lives. We know seniors and elders in long-term care (LTC) and assisted living facilities are most vulnerable to infection, in addition to frontline workers who are working in our healthcare system.

The initial batch of vaccine will be focused on immunizing healthcare workers in LTC and in acute care hospitals, including those that work in ICU, COVID-19 wards and emergency departments.

Public Health is continuing to work on the details of the vaccine program roll-out to ensure it provides equitable access across the province, so that those without wi-fi or who live in remote communities, will have fair access to it, if they so wish.

Timelines for Community Immunity

Dr. Henry expects that by fall, the pandemic will be on its last legs as more populations are immunized with various vaccines. With other pandemics, a reduction in cases is seen as the vaccine roll-out expands, and Dr. Henry expects a similar situation to occur with COVID-19 and these vaccines. 70-80% uptake of the vaccine is what is required to achieve 'community immunity'. When asked about vaccine hesitancy, she referenced a study conducted by BCCDC which shows that here in B.C., 86 per cent of people intend to receive the vaccine. This statistic does vary based on different geographical regions of B.C., but it gives her confidence.

Dr. Brown Briefing

Dr. Ross Brown also gave an overview on the logistical planning. He emphasized that while we have never delivered a vaccination program of this scale, Public Health has a strong backbone that is already in place and refined from other vaccination programs, including seasonal influenza, measles and others. The Ministry is working in close partnership with a number of healthcare stakeholder including the BCCDC, FNHA, Canadian Armed Forces, Canadian Red Cross, Health Authority leadership and others. They will adopt a slow, steady and nimble approach as more vaccines become available. They have conducted a simulation exercise for the arrival and distribution of the vaccine, to address any logistical challenges before the first vaccine batch arrives next week. The scope of the roll-out will expand as B.C. receives further batches and Dr. Brown expects 7 additional vaccination sites will be set-up in January 2021.

Health Canada Approves Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine

Today, Health Canada announced it has granted interim authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for clinical use in Canada. This decision signals the medicine's regulator has reviewed all clinical trial data and has deemed the vaccine both safe and effective for use.

Canada is now one of the first countries in the world to approve the use of this product. The vaccine, which is delivered as two doses 21 days apart, is expected to begin arriving in Canada next week with an initial batch of 30,000 doses. Data from Pfizer indicates it is 95 per cent efficacious against the disease seven days after the second dose. The vaccine has also been very effective in preventing severe illness. It is already being administered to frontline staff in the United Kingdom, following its authorization by their medicine's regulator the MHRA last week.

Moderna Vaccine

The second vaccine brand to come to B.C. will most likely be Moderna. Health Canada is currently reviewing data for this product. It also uses messenger RNA (mRNA), a similar manufacturing process used by Pfizer for their vaccine. These vaccine types have been investigated for decades, but this is the first time it has been manufactured to this scale. She did emphasize that mRNA is delicate, and requires very specific transport and storage requirements.

VCH Website and Translation Engagement

VCH has started two important projects – the redesign of the VCH website and a review of VCH translation practices. Your input in the web design project and the translation needs at VCH for safe care will help us improve our translation tools and ensure our future website is a user-friendly resource that is easy to navigate. We are hosting Zoom focus groups to hear from the diverse communities we serve. To register for our upcoming focus group times and dates (see the attached poster), please email ce@vch.ca.

Testing

Anyone in the VCH region with cold, influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms, however mild, can now be assessed for and get a COVID-19 test. Contact your physician or nurse practitioner's office, or a local community collection centre to arrange for a test. Phone numbers and locations of collection centres can be found by visiting: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing> or by calling 8-1-1. For more information and latest updates on COVID-19, follow the BC Centre for Disease Control on Twitter @CDCofBC or visit the website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>.

Other Resources

To find the Provincial Health Officer's orders, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

To see a map of COVID-19 cases by local health area, visit:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/data>

For a listing of the community exposure events, go to: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/public-exposures>

For the latest medical updates, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>

For community engagement opportunities at VCH, see: <http://cean.vch.ca/members/current-opportunities/>