

LATEST UPDATE – Feb. 24, 2021

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 joint statement on B.C.'s COVID-19 response, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, and Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, reported 456 new cases.

The total number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in B.C. now stands at 78,278 since the start of the pandemic. Of the new cases, 108 people were in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region.

Across the province, there were two new COVID-19 related deaths, while 237 people are currently hospitalized, with 64 of these cases receiving treatment in ICU/critical care. The total number of individuals who have passed away due to COVID-19 is 1,338. There are now 4,668 active cases of COVID-19 across B.C. currently.

The number of cases of COVID-19 – active cases and close contacts who are required to self-isolate at home – has been creeping higher over the last week. We need to hold steady and ensure these cases don't surge.

Dr. Henry said close attention is being paid to the variants of concern to understand their effects on our province and our communities. Screening for variants requires a second, more time-consuming laboratory test that has delayed our ability to screen all new cases. The Province has been working to fast-track this work with new screening methods. Today, 70% of confirmed positive cases are screened, with that anticipated to increase to 100% over the coming week.

It is our individual efforts that slow the spread of COVID-19 and our collective efforts that will see us through this pandemic. No matter the variant, the measures we take to stop the spread are exactly the same.

Vaccination update

Since the start of immunizations, 230,875 vaccinations have been delivered in B.C. (not including today), with 62,608 of those being a second dose.

Dr. Henry said she is introducing a new order to increase the pool of people who can provide vaccinations. This order will allow a number of health professionals and occupations, with appropriate training, to work in immunization clinics. This includes dentists, midwives, pharmacy technicians, paramedics, retired nurses and other professions. This means the workforce needed will be available to provide a vaccine to everyone who wants one during the next six months.

With more vaccine increasingly available, the focus is being turned to people aged over 80 in our communities, who will receive vaccine information in the next two weeks.

Health Minister Adrian Dix said detailed information about B.C.'s immunization plan, especially for people older than the age of 80, will be announced on Monday.

More information and immunization data is available through this page: [BCCDC](#)

Squamish overdose prevention site opens

VCH and Squamish Helping Hands, in partnership with the Sea to Sky Community Action Team (CAT), have opened an overdose prevention site (OPS) in Squamish in response to the increasing number of overdoses in this community. The new site is now open to the public at the former Helping Hands shelter on Third Avenue.

"We are now in the sixth year of a significant and unyielding public health emergency. Squamish and other communities across our region continue to report record numbers of illegal drug overdose deaths. This new OPS will ensure people who are at risk of overdose in this community have access to low-barrier and lifesaving harm reduction services. Evidence tells us this model of care saves lives," says Dr. Patricia Daly, VCH Chief Medical Health Officer.

Maureen Mackell, Executive Director of Squamish Helping Hands Society said right now the drug supply is toxic and even recreational users' lives are at risk. "For this reason, it is vital that people do not feel afraid to access harm reduction services in their community. This includes simply having their drugs checked for dangerous toxic additives to using in a supervised environment. There is no other solution to the housing crisis but housing. Likewise, there is no other solution to the overdose crisis than safe use."

VCH will provide education, clinical support, and harm reduction supplies, while Helping Hands will manage the day-to-day operations of the OPS. Staff and local peers who have been trained in overdose prevention and harm reduction will monitor clients on-site and where appropriate, they will facilitate access to addiction treatments and supports. The service is funded by VCH as well as the Sea to Sky CAT, which includes members from municipal governments, Squamish Nation, first responders, frontline community agencies, experts, and residents and families with lived experience.

VCH and Squamish Helping Hands Society are committed to ensuring that the site operates as a good neighbour to local residents and businesses, and are available to address any questions or concerns that arise. As with other OPS in the VCH

region, staff will ensure a safe and well-kept environment surrounding the facility by conducting regular sweeps for discarded harm reduction supplies and litter. More information can be found [here](#).

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/>