

February 17, 2021

**Vaccine Arriving this Week - Immunization Plan Resuming**

Yesterday, Dr. Bonnie Henry shared her concerns regarding increases in COVID-19 rolling average case counts, positivity rates, and the reproduction rate (how many people each case transmits to). We are sad to report three COVID-19 deaths over the Family Day weekend in Central Vancouver Island. Our thoughts are with the care teams, and the friends and family of our patients. We are all strongly encouraged to take effective individual action to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and we acknowledge the unique and valuable contributions of all primary care providers and all the members of your teams. We are pleased to share that the Immunization [Plan](#) will resume this week with higher than expected deliveries of the Pfizer vaccine.

Per provincial direction, at this time primary care providers will not be asked to administer the vaccine to the public in their clinics. We acknowledge that primary care providers are receiving questions from both patients and community members about mass immunization and we would like to draw attention to some NEW Q&As (Feb. 17) for primary care teams that we have included in this edition (see below).

We appreciate all primary care providers who have come forward to volunteer for mass immunization, and at this time, all planning and decision-making for public immunizations is led by the Government of BC, Immunize BC and appropriate health authorities working in collaboration. Using information and relationships developed by engaging community organizations early in the plan, the specific locations for mass immunization clinics on Vancouver Island are being finalized, and the official web-based process for immunization sign-up will be made available in the coming weeks. We echo the General Practices Services Committee who indicated “It will be much later in the process before clinics or community pharmacies are broadly used in urban areas [for public immunization]. For this to happen, we need vaccines that do not require the same special considerations for handling, ideally require only one dose, and the provincial reporting system will need to be fully in place.” Finally, specific training for public immunization providers will also be required and implemented prior to inviting primary care providers to administer immunizations, and work is underway with our provincial colleagues to meet all BCCDC training requirements.

<b>Phase 1</b> Dec 2020-Feb 2021	<b>Phase 2</b> Feb-March 2021
<b>High-risk population</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents, staff, and essential visitors to long-term care and assisted living</li> <li>Individuals assessed for/awaiting long-term care</li> <li>Hospital health care workers who may provide care for COVID-19 patients</li> <li>Remote and isolated Indigenous communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seniors aged 80+ who are not yet immunized</li> <li>Indigenous seniors aged 65+, Elders, and additional communities not yet immunized</li> <li>Hospital staff, community GPs and medical specialists not yet immunized</li> <li>Vulnerable populations in select congregated settings</li> <li>Staff in community home support and nursing services for seniors</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3</b> April-June 2021	<b>Phase 4</b> July-Sept 2021
<b>General population</b>	
<p>People aged 79 to 60, in five year increments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79 to 75</li> <li>74 to 70</li> <li>69 to 65</li> <li>64 to 60</li> <li>People aged 69 to 16 who are clinically extremely vulnerable</li> </ul>	<p>People aged 59 to 18, in five year increments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59 to 55</li> <li>54 to 50</li> <li>49 to 45</li> <li>44 to 40</li> <li>39 to 35</li> <li>34 to 30</li> <li>29 to 25</li> <li>24 to 18</li> </ul>
<p>Once more vaccines are approved/available, people 64 to 18 yrs who are front-line essential workers or work in specific workplaces/industries may be included later in Phase 3.</p>	

**ACTIVE COVID-19 CASES**

- Island Health had three COVID-19 deaths over the Family Day weekend in Central Vancouver Island.
- COVID-19 outbreaks have been declared at Wexford Creek and Eden Gardens long-term care homes in Nanaimo. One staff person has tested positive for COVID-19 at each site, and one elder (resident) at Eden Gardens has also tested positive. Read the [full release](#).

- As of Feb 16th @ 4:30pm via the [BC COVID-19 Dashboard](#)
  - 2 new deaths, with 22 total COVID-19 related deaths in Island Health
  - 180 people with active COVID-19 in Island Health
  - 16 in hospital – 7 in Critical Care - 2 outbreaks in Island Health facilities
- Real-time COVID-19 data is available on the [BC COVID-19 Dashboard](#)
- The latest COVID-19 [Island Health Dashboard](#) - (Feb 16)

## VACCINATIONS

- Due to low vaccine supply last week, only modest increases were made in Phase 1 vaccination. As of Feb. 16<sup>th</sup>, Island Health had administered 29,130 doses of COVID-19 vaccine in communities from Victoria to Port Hardy to Tofino.
- Dr. Henry provided some encouraging [news](#) about what deferring the second dose of vaccine can mean in terms of vaccine effectiveness. She explained that early data from long-term care in Quebec and from the World Health Organization shows that delaying the second dose by several weeks does not have a negative affect, and may result in a stronger and more lasting response.

## OUR FOCUS THIS WEEK

- Phase 1 immunization is now expanding to include:
  - Island Health Urgent Care Centres (Port Alice, Oceanside, Ladysmith, and Chemainus);
  - Rural/Remote Primary Care Providers who work in settings similar to Urgent Care Centres; and
  - COVID-19 Assessment Clinics.
- The timeline for B.C.'s COVID-19 Vaccination Plan is dependent on vaccine supply and is subject to change due to vaccine availability; all people in B.C. recommended to receive the vaccine will have the opportunity in 2021.
- If, due to your work with long-term care or emergency departments, you have received your first dose, you will be contacted by Island Health's call centre when it is time for your second appointment. Second doses are being scheduled to take place 42 days after the first dose. The BCCDC is the best source for the [latest guidelines on first and second dose timelines](#).
- Primary care providers who did not receive their vaccine in Phase 1 will be eligible in Phase 2 along with their allied health staff providing direct patient care and office staff. More information will be coming through Divisions on how these individuals will be identified and contacted for appointments.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & FAQs

In this issue, we developed some Q&As to help primary care teams understand where we are in the Immunization Plan and what we all need to know moving forward.

### **What is the status of Island Health staff immunizations?**

*We are currently still in Phase 1, which focuses on the highest-risk populations. Some health-care workers fall into this category, but not all. In Phase 1, in addition to all staff and physicians who work in long-term care and assisted living, the strategy is focused on health-care providers most likely to provide care for COVID-19 patients. Phase 2 will roll out beginning later this month. Island Health staff who do not work directly with patients or in patient care areas will be immunized with their population age grouping as part of the provincial mass immunization strategy.*

### **How will vaccinations for community members in the next phase of 80 and over take place? Is there a booking process or call-in procedure for the community?**

*The province is working on a centralized registration system, but initially we will be reaching out to the 80+ and 65+ Indigenous population utilizing our call centre. There will be a formal booking process, and we'll directly reach out to communities and locations where these people currently live.*

### **How will the general public be notified to book an appointment when their age category is to be immunized?**

*Immunization of the general population is currently scheduled to begin in Phase 3 in April 2021. Before then, details will be available about when and how to pre-register for a vaccine, utilizing a centralized registration system for the province. By pre-registering, a community member will be able to reserve an appointment at a clinic. The timeline for BC's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan is dependent on vaccine supply and availability. It's important to understand the timeline for each phase may change due to vaccine availability.*

### **Are we seeing more community spread on the Island? Any updates on how we are doing with our contact-tracing?**

*The majority of those testing positive for COVID-19 are linked to known COVID-19 cases – this has been consistent throughout the pandemic in Island Health and is closely monitored. The Case and Contact Management Team is able to manage cases and contacts usually well within 24 hours of being notified of a new case.*

### **Do current immunizations protect us against variant strains like B.1.351 (South Africa) and B.1.1.28.1 (Brazil) that are in Canada?**

*Information about the characteristics of these variants is rapidly emerging. Genetic variation of viruses such as the one that causes COVID-19 is to be expected and has been previously observed in parts of the world and in Canada. Island Health continues to monitor if there is evidence at this time that the mutations have any impact on symptom severity, antibody response or vaccine efficacy. BC is reviewing cases to identify associations with variants in the province.*

## LINKS, RESOURCES & FAQs

### **Immunization Training Resources:**

- Physicians who are looking for COVID-19 immunization education can access the following webinars on [LearningHub](#), which are about 45 minutes in total:
  - [BCCDC COVID-19 Immunization Webinars](#)
  - [COVID-19 Vaccine Overview](#)
  - [COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines](#)

This training will be required for those supporting Health Authority Mass Immunization Clinics, and Island Health is actively collaborating with our provincial colleagues to ensure we meet all the training requirements established by the CBCDC.

Additionally, physicians who are looking for a refresher course for immunization practice in general (i.e., not specific to COVID-19), the [Pearls for Immunization Practice](#) course is a great option, as it provides practical immunization information to assist immunizers in the practice setting as well as highlights important immunization resources. This online course is posted on the UBC Continuing Professional Development website, and is CME accredited.

**Post COVID-19 Recovery:**

- [The Post COVID-19 Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network](#) coordinates care, research, and education for recovery. Visit the programs and services section of the Provincial Health Services Authority website.
- [Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise \(RACE\)](#): The provincial post COVID-19 Rapid Access to Specialist Consultation (RACE) line is staffed Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm. Call 1-604-696-2131. An account is required. Specialty area name: COVID-GIM-Post-Infection Care.

**BCCDC Resources:**

- [New Today](#): This section of the website highlights the latest guidance documents and updates to the website for health professionals.
- [About the vaccines](#)
- [Resources for Health Professionals](#)
- [Reporting adverse events](#)

**Doctors of BC:**

- [Info for doctors getting or giving the vaccine](#)
- [Updated toolkit for doctors' offices](#)

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

- [ImmunizeBC FAQ](#)