

Public Health Restrictions Lifting for COVID-19 & Fall Influenza Immunization Campaign – October 5, 2022

The Government of Canada ended all [federal border](#) COVID-19 masking, testing, quarantine, and isolation requirements on October 1, 2022. There is no requirement to test if someone displays symptoms of COVID-19, and testing is recommended when an individual would benefit from treatment and/or would avoid hospitalization. Anyone can access a free rapid antigen testing kit from [any participating local pharmacy](#). As a reminder, all healthcare professionals, providers, contracted partners, and site visitors are still required to wear masks at all times when in healthcare facilities and settings where health care is provided.

Anyone can book appointments for COVID-19 (and Influenza) immunization using the central [Get Vaccinated system](#) or by calling 1-833-838-2323 (toll-free). COVID-19 booster doses in BC for those age 18 and above (and for those age 12 and above who are at [higher risk of harm from COVID-19](#)) will be the bivalent vaccine. You can request an alternative vaccine when you book your appointment, and the system will match patients to their preferred location based on age and chosen vaccines. COVID-19 bivalent vaccines are adapted versions of the mRNA vaccine and target the original COVID-19 virus and the Omicron variant. COVID-19 fall boosters can help to prolong immune response and extend protection against severe illness as we enter into respiratory season during colder months. For patients who have already had COVID-19, they can still receive the booster since the combination of infection and vaccination provides the strongest protection (i.e. "hybrid immunity") - it is recommended that patients wait three to six months after infection before getting their booster dose. The BCCBC Public Health Laboratory recently shared that "SARS-CoV-2, influenza A, influenza B and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) testing will be performed on specimens when requested as per routine seasonal practice. Starting in October, microbiology laboratories throughout BC will perform multiplex testing for the above viruses, where feasible and where not done already."¹

This respiratory season, influenza vaccine will also be accessible through health authority clinics providing both COVID-19 and influenza vaccination; in addition to 'whole community' clinics occurring through October and November. Given these investments, Dr. Mike Benusic shared at the Primary Care Taskforce last month that most people are to access influenza vaccination through health authority clinics or pharmacies, and this was also echoed in [the latest newsletter](#) from the Chief Medical Health Officer. This strategy has also taken into consideration the current strains on access to primary care appointments. As a result, this season less vaccine is being allocated to primary care providers. **For this season, please only [order influenza vaccine](#) for patients who have barriers to accessing vaccination clinics (eg. mobility issues, home visits).** Thank you for your understanding and support with reaching patients with access barriers.

Please be aware that Island Health closed the Downtown Victoria UPCC Covid-19 assessment referral pathway at the end of September. The Covid-19 Assessment Clinics were a collaborative effort with Island Health and the Divisions of Family Practices and we thank everyone for their efforts over the course of the last two and half years. A reminder that other resources including the [COVID-19 Outpatient Therapeutics Clinic](#), the [Post-COVID-19 Clinic](#) and [RACE Line](#) continue.

The Government of British Columbia (BC) recently released [elements of its multi-year health workforce strategy](#). The entire plan has not been fully released, and 2022-23 elements include a focus on new undergraduate medical education and residency seats, and notably, "beginning Oct. 14, pharmacists will [be able to] adapt and renew prescriptions for a wider range of drugs and conditions, and they will be able to administer, further to a prescription, a wider range of drugs by injection or intranasally."

¹ Memo: Respiratory Virus Laboratory Testing Practices and Guidelines for 2022/2023 Season – September 23, 2022.

Island Health Region Total COVID-19 Vaccines Administered To Date	% Population Immunized (12+) 2nd Dose To Date	% Population Immunized (5+) 2nd Dose To Date	% Population Immunized (12+) Two Doses & Boosters To Date
2,210,662	94.1%	91.3%	67.4%

NEW RESOURCES

[BCCDC: September 28: COVID-19: Viral Testing Guidelines for British Columbia](#)

- These testing guidelines provide guidance on recommendations for COVID-19 testing.

BCCDC: Updated Sept. 22: ImmunizeBC Standard Operating Procedures for Pfizer Vaccines

- [Pfizer Pediatric Vaccine Shipping, Storage, Thawing and Use Guidelines \(Orange/Maroon cap\)](#)
- [Pfizer Pediatric Redistribution Guidelines \(Orange/Maroon Cap\)](#)

BCCDC: Updated Sept. 21: [Guidance for Discontinuing Additional Precautions Related to COVID-19 for Admitted Patients in Acute Care and in High-Risk Outpatient Areas](#)

- This guidance is intended for health-care providers working in acute care settings including infection prevention and control (IPC); workplace health and safety and public health teams; direct care providers (e.g., physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses); patient access and flow teams; and unit and site leadership.

BCCDC: Updated Sept. 8: [Therapy in Adult Pregnant Patients with COVID-19](#)

- BC Women's Hospital and British Columbia COVID-19 Therapeutics Committee (CTC) Clinical Practice Guidance for Therapy in Adult Pregnant Patients with COVID-19.

BCCDC: Updated Sept. 8: [Clinical Guidance on COVID-19 Vaccines for Solid Organ](#)

- People who have received an organ transplant may require specific advice and counseling prior to COVID-19 immunization.

[NACI Advisory Statement: People at High Risk of Influenza-Related Complications or Hospitalization](#)

Additional information regarding particularly recommended high-risk recipients for influenza vaccine:

- All children 6-59 months of age; adults and children with chronic health conditions; people living with neurologic or neurodevelopment conditions.

[Past Issues of the Island Health Primary Care Update](#)

BCCDC Resources:

- [New Today](#): Highlights the latest guidance documents and updates to the website
- [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](#)