Daily update – April 20, 2020

Premier John Horgan announced today that a new collaborative framework will help ensure people living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities in B.C. have access to critical health care they can count on to meet their unique needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future. Developed through a partnership between the First Nations Health Authority, Northern Health and Provincial Health Services Authority, the framework outlines immediate actions to improve health-care services and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- improved medical transportation options to larger centres, including flight and ambulance;
- housing options for people looking to self-isolate near their families while remaining in their home communities;
- new and faster COVID-19 testing technology;
- culturally safe contact tracing that respects privacy in small communities;
- access to Virtual Doctor of the Day, a program that connects First Nations members and their families in remote communities to a doctor or nurse practitioner using videoconferencing;
- options for accommodation near larger centres with more medical services; and
- increased mental-health supports in communities.

Local leadership will determine how these services operate in their communities, with the priority being to ensure residents can make informed choices about how they receive care.

At today’s Ministry of Health briefing, Dr. Bonnie Henry announced 29 new cases of COVID-19 on Sunday, and 23 new cases today, bringing the total to date to 1,699 confirmed cases; 700 have been in Vancouver Coastal Health. Currently 104 people are hospitalized throughout the province as a result of the virus, with 49 patients in critical care, and 1,039 people are fully recovered. There are still 20 long-term care and assisted living residences that are under outbreak protocol, and one outbreak in an acute care unit. Unfortunately, five more people in B.C. have lost their lives to COVID-19 — our hearts go out to their friends and family.

Dr. Henry also said that anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 can now be tested, in an effort to avoid a spike in community transmission. She said the testing strategy in B.C. has evolved based on the changing pandemic situation, and added that while everyone can now be tested, not everyone should be, as the test has limited benefit for people who do not have symptoms. Anyone with cold, influenza or COVID-like symptoms can now be assessed and get a COVID-19 test from a physician, nurse practitioner or an urgent and primary care centre. You can also call 8-1-1 to find a testing centre near you or visit http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-
conditions/covid-19/testing. If you think you need testing, please call ahead before visiting your GP, NP or health clinic.

She also reiterated that while B.C. has had some success in bending the curve of infection, British Colombians should not expect any change in the restrictions on daily life until at least mid-May. At that time some sectors, including health care, may see some restrictions lifted, but large gatherings are unlikely to be allowed. During her briefing on Saturday, Dr. Henry said we don’t have enough herd immunity to allow those types of events to happen in 2020. For personal gatherings this year, Dr. Henry said there is the possibility this summer for more social interaction, but we need to find a sweet spot — a balancing of connection, but still protecting the system and those who are most vulnerable. She suggests people “think small” for funerals, weddings, and parties with friends and family.

Also over the weekend, Mike Farnworth, B.C.’s public safety minister says anyone caught reselling medical supplies at inflated prices during the pandemic will now face $2,000 fines. He said police forces across the province will be granted powers to issue tickets with those fines, and municipal bylaw officers, liquor and cannabis inspectors, park rangers and other provincial and local officials will help with enforcement.

VCH Medical Health Officers, our provincial partners and the Public Health Agency of Canada continue to actively monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. To protect yourself while out in public, wash your hands frequently and maintain social distance. Anyone who has symptoms — including a fever, cough, sneezing, sore throat, or difficulty breathing — should self-isolate for 10 days, and seek medical care if symptoms do not improve 5-7 days following symptom onset. If you think you need testing, please call ahead before visiting your GP, urgent and primary care centre or health clinic. Find out where you can get tested at http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing.

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/.