

Daily update – March 17, 2020

Today, Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s provincial health officer, declared a public health emergency in B.C., which enables the Province to be faster, more streamlined and nimble. The declaration also means Dr. Henry can issue verbal orders with immediate effect, and authorizes peace officers to enforce her verbal orders. This is the second public health emergency in B.C. — the first was issued in 2016 in response to the overdose crisis.

Together with Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, Dr. Henry announced 83 new cases of COVID-19 in British Columbia, which brings the total number of confirmed cases in the province to 183; in the Vancouver Coastal Health Region there have been 116 confirmed cases. We are deeply saddened to announce that two more of those cases — residents of the Lynn Valley Care Centre — have passed away. We offer our deepest sympathy to their loved ones and the staff who cared for them during this difficult time.

The vast majority of confirmed COVID-19 cases are recovering in isolation at home. Currently, there are seven people hospitalized, with four of them in intensive care. Five cases have fully recovered and there are many more with mild symptoms who haven't yet met the criteria to be assessed as "fully recovered."

COVID testing guidance has shifted, with testing now offered to people with respiratory symptoms who are:

- Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized
- Health-care workers
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak

A new self-assessment tool, developed with the BC Ministry of Health, will help determine whether you may need further assessment or testing for COVID-19. Find it at covid19.thrive.health.

The directive to maintain social distance of one to two metres remains in place. Yesterday, Vancouver Coastal Health Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Patricia Daly announced that all restaurants, bars, lounges and similar venues throughout the City of Vancouver were required to close their doors today to prevent annual St. Patrick's Day celebrations, which often draw a large crowd. Under today's provincial declaration of a public health emergency, Dr. Henry



expanded upon that requirement, ordering the closure of bars, clubs and other entertainment that cannot maintain enough space between patrons for social distancing. Restaurants and cafes that can maintain enough space may remain open, or move to takeout or delivery options.

Also today, B.C. Premier John Horgan and Education Minister Rob Fleming announced that in-class instruction in all schools in the province is suspended until further notice to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. While the majority of the province’s schools are already on spring break, any remaining schools that have not yet closed are being directed to do so now. The province may transition to online teaching, and more information will soon be forthcoming.

VCH Medical Health Officers, our provincial partners and the Public Health Agency of Canada continue to actively monitor the situation regarding COVID-19, which has been assessed by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. We strongly urges anyone who has symptoms — including a fever, cough, sneezing, sore throat, or difficulty breathing — to self-isolate for 14 days. To protect yourself while out in public, wash your hands frequently and maintain social distance.

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/>

