March 16, 2020

Dear VCH Home Support Client,

You’ve probably been hearing about coronavirus or COVID-19 in the news, or from family and friends.

**What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a virus that causes respiratory illness – meaning it affects the lungs and/or other parts of the respiratory system. It can spread through droplets when people cough or sneeze, or if you touch an infected surface with your hands and then touch your face. Common symptoms of COVID-19 may include:

- cough
- fever, and/or
- difficulty breathing

Most people who contract the virus will experience mild to moderate symptoms similar to a cold or flu. Individuals with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease; hypertension; diabetes; chronic respiratory disease and cancer, are more at risk of developing serious complications.

We understand that you may have questions about how to protect yourself, and about what Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is doing to ensure that you are not exposed to the virus by a care provider. We would like to reassure you that we are committed to protecting the health and safety of all of our clients and our staff, and that we are here to provide support and answer your questions.

**What are we doing to protect you?**

Home Support workers are trained in important infection control practices, including:

- washing their hands before and after providing care
- using gloves, masks and other protective equipment as appropriate
- reporting symptoms of client illness to their supervisor for follow-up care

Workers are also instructed not to come to work if they are ill.

**What can you do to prepare and protect yourself and others?**

- Make sure you have enough essential food and supplies so you don’t have to leave home if you become ill
- Refill your prescriptions if there’s a risk you may run out
- Let your family, friends and neighbors know that you’re making a plan and talk to them about a buddy system where you agree to help each other and run important errands if you become sick
- Find new ways to greet each other that do not involve shaking hands or other types of close contact
If you develop symptoms of illness, especially a new cough or fever, or have had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, call 811 or your family doctor, and call your home support office to let them know that you have been exposed or are ill, so that your care worker can take enhanced precautions. You will be asked to wear a mask during your home support visit.

The best way to protect yourself is to practice good hand washing. Please wash your hands frequently, especially before and after contact with other people. A hand washing guide is attached which describes the best way to keep your hands clean – this involves washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer, with at least 60% alcohol content, is a good alternative if soap and water is not available. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or flexed elbow, immediately dispose of any used tissues and clean your hands.

How do I stay informed?

Ensure that you have accurate information. For more information and updates about COVID-19:

- HealthLinkBC - https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-feature/coronavirus-disease-
- BC COVID Information Line – 1 (888) 268-4319

Thank you for reading and using the information in this letter. We know that by working together, we will have the best chance to keep each other, and our communities, healthy and safe!