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February 9, 2021

Dear valued partners:

I am writing you with a brief update on the rollout of the COVID-19 immunization Plan for the underhoused and unhoused individuals in the Island Health region.

The vaccination rollout follows directions from the provincial government. All regions in the province must follow BC's Immunization Plan, which is available [here](#). Island Health has been busy planning the Phase 2 (February – March) immunization rollout with communities and partners and will continue to follow provincial directions.

In the next few weeks, vulnerable populations living and working in select congregated settings will be eligible to receive the vaccine, as vaccine becomes available on Vancouver Island. Persons who are experiencing homelessness and/or using shelters have always been included in this vulnerable group, and further detailed descriptions will be posted on the BCCDC site when available. At this time, the vaccine is only approved for use for people who are 18 and over.

Please note that details about the COVID-19 immunization rollout changes rapidly – we encourage you to visit and promote these “sources of truth” for up-to-date information:

- [COVID-19 vaccine information](#) (BC Centre For Disease Control)
- [BC's COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#) (Province of BC)
- [COVID-19 vaccine questions and answers](#) (ImmunizeBC)
- [COVID-19 vaccine](#) (Island Health public website)
- [Vaccine safety and efficacy](#) (Health Canada)
- [FNHA COVID Vaccine Safety](#) (First Nations Health Authority)
- [COVID-19 and Harm Reduction for People Who Use Substances](#) (BCCDC)

On the following pages you will find some FAQs that will assist in answering questions that may come to service providers like yourself in the weeks to come.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sandra Allison  
Medical Health Officer, Island Health

## ***COVID-19 Immunization FAQs***

**Please be aware that the COVID vaccine rollout is changing rapidly. Check the resources listed above from the Medical Health Officer as these are “sources of truth” for accurate, credible and up-to-date information.**

### **Why should I get vaccinated?**

Vaccines save lives. The COVID vaccine may save your life and the lives of your friends and loved ones. The more people who are vaccinated, the better chance we all have of protecting everyone in the community.

### **Do I have to get the vaccine?**

No, you don't. Getting the vaccine is completely voluntary. No one is forcing you to get the vaccine, and it is your decision to make. It is highly recommended that everyone gets the vaccine so you can protect yourself and others.

### **How does the vaccine work?**

The vaccine teaches our cells how to make copies of coronavirus proteins. These copies are harmless to the person getting the vaccine and trigger an immune response, should the vaccinated person become infected by the coronavirus. After two doses, the vaccine has been found to be about 95% effective – which is considered to be a very high rate of effectiveness. After one dose, the vaccine is more than 90% effective. Ensure you make a plan with the nurse to return on the correct date for your second dose to receive the full protection.

### **Is the vaccine safe?**

Yes. The vaccine is safe and has been approved for use by Health Canada and by leading health agencies in many other countries (including the USA, United Kingdom and European Union). Well-known people are receiving the vaccine to build trust, demonstrate leadership and show it is safe. As more vaccine becomes available, other people you may know personally will get the vaccine to show that they trust in it.

### **What do I tell people when they ask me about conspiracy theories or vocally deny scientific evidence of vaccines?**

Knowing the source of truth key messages will help you be prepared when faced with vaccine skepticism. Acknowledge that you have heard their question or concern and provide reassurance of related key messages found in the 'source of truth' list. Refrain from entering into unscientific dialogues. Recognize trusted sources. Health-care providers and Public Health Nurses have additional training to counsel vaccine hesitancy and may be referred to if someone is trying to sort through information. Immunization is a personal decision.

### **What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

Most people only develop mild soreness in the arm where the vaccine is injected, which usually goes away in a couple of days. You might also feel under the weather after you get immunized; for example, you may get body chills and feel tired and feverish. That's normal and will pass. There is a very small chance that you might have an allergic reaction. That's why we ask that you sit tight at the place you got your vaccination for 15 minutes after you get your shot.

### **Is everyone getting the same vaccine?**

Right now there are two vaccines approved for use in Canada. Both vaccines have been used to vaccinate Canadians so far. It is most likely you will receive the Moderna vaccine because this vaccine is easier to store and transport. Many people, including health-care providers and Indigenous people in rural and remote communities have already had the Moderna vaccine. Your second dose will also be the Moderna vaccine.

### **What are the ingredients in the vaccine?**

Medicinal and non-medicinal ingredients for the Moderna vaccine are available on this Government of Canada [webpage](#). The ingredients are:

#### **Medicinal ingredient**

- mRNA (teaches cells how to temporarily make proteins)

#### **Non-medicinal ingredients**

- lipids/fats (protect the mRNA), including PEG
- acetic acid (like in vinegar)
- stabilizers
- salts
- sugars

### **Can I get COVID from the vaccine?**

No. You can't get COVID from the vaccine itself. If you get a cough, sore throat or breathing problems after the vaccine, you should get tested for COVID, because the vaccine doesn't cause these symptoms.

### **Is the vaccine safe if I use other drugs, including illicit ones? Would I have to stop using my other drugs if I want to get the vaccine?**

There are no specific interactions between the vaccine and other medications, including illicit drugs, that we know of. You should be feeling well when you are about to receive the vaccine.

### **I have seen a lot of information on social media and the Internet about vaccine concerns and risks. Since this is a new vaccine, what do we really know about it?**

The vaccine is safe and highly effective. We know there is a lot of information about the vaccine on various social media and Internet sites. Unfortunately, much of this is not correct, and comes from sources that are not credible. Please refer to the sources listed in the letter above. These are factual, accurate and credible sources where you can find more information about the vaccine.

**I think I have had COVID. Do I still need to get the vaccine?**

Yes. You should plan to get the vaccine even if you had or may have had COVID. This is because you may not be immune to the virus that causes COVID, and you could get infected again, become sick and transmit the virus to others.

**If I have had the vaccine and still get COVID, would I get less sick?**

Yes. Evidence shows that people who have received the vaccine and still get COVID get less sick. The effectiveness of preventing COVID after 14 days of getting the first dose of the vaccine is over 90%. After you have received your second dose, effectiveness increases to 95%.

**Once I have had both shots of the vaccine, do I still need to wear a mask and physically distance?**

Yes. This is because it will take a while before everyone who wants the shot is vaccinated. Also, it is not yet known whether someone who is vaccinated can still pass the COVID virus on to someone who is not vaccinated. Wearing a mask and continuing to physically distance reduces this risk.

**Who gets the vaccine, and when?**

The rollout of vaccination on Vancouver Island follows directions from the provincial government. All regions in BC must follow BC's Immunization Plan. That plan can be read on the BC government's [COVID-19 Immunization Plan page](#).

**How do I get a vaccine?**

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to get the vaccination. Island Health and community service organizations are working to figure out the best ways to do so – please be patient and we will provide updates soon.

Island Health is not booking COVID vaccination appointments for the general public yet. Everyone for whom the vaccine is recommended, and everyone who wants a vaccine, will be offered one by September 2021. Please note that this timeline is based on vaccine availability and may change.

**What can I do to continue to protect myself?**

Continue to wash your hands often, don't touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, stay physically apart from others (at least two metres or six feet) as much as possible, wear a mask in indoor public spaces, do not share drinks, cigarettes, vapes or other supplies, avoid social gatherings, and notify your health-care provider if you are sick. If you use substances refer to [COVID-19 and Harm Reduction for People Who Use Substances](#) (BCCDC). If you have COVID symptoms, health-care providers can help arrange a test for you.

Now and after the vaccine, continue with COVID precautions until we achieve a community level immunity where the virus isn't spreading.