

June 20, 2023

Highway 4 closure

Q1. Are operations at West Coast General or Tofino General Hospitals affected? Can I still get emergency care?

- **Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of many, including nurses, support staff, local physicians and physicians from other communities, staffing is stable at both hospitals and there are no anticipated service interruptions at this time. Should that change, we will communicate directly to the affected communities.**
- **If you need emergency care, do not hesitate to attend the nearest emergency department.**
- **If you are unsure if you're experiencing a situation requiring emergency care, health care advice from a trained professional is available 24/7 by calling 811.**
- **For information and connection to community health services, you can call 1-877-734-4101.**
- **Community virtual care is available to support a range of conditions, with no cost or referral needed. Call 250-519-7700, ext. 11928 for information and connection.**

Q2. If I need to be urgently transferred out of the community for care, is that still happening? What if ambulances can't get through the alternate route?

- **Patients that require urgent transfers to higher levels of care are managed by BC Emergency Health Services. We are working closely with them to coordinate urgent patient transfers, as we always do.**
- **So far, there has been no impact to the ability to transport patients safely and in a timely manner.**

Q3. What about cancer patients or renal patients who need to get to Nanaimo or even Victoria?

- **Island Health and BC Cancer are working closely to support these patients.**
- **We are identifying patients on the west coast requiring chemotherapy or radiation outside of community during the highway closure and connecting directly with them to understand their individual situations and create contingency plans that work for them.**
- **Some patients have been continuing to coordinate their own travel, while others have received supports to ensure they can access the care they need.**

- **Island Health is piloting temporary alternative chemotherapy options on-site at West Coast General Hospital. Patients will be contacted directly with appointment times and specific details.**

Q4. Should people be worried about air quality?

- **Island Health’s Medical Health Officer is monitoring that situation, in conjunction with Environment Canada and the Province.**
- **The best thing for people to do is check their local [air quality health index online](#). Conditions can change quickly.**
- **We also have resources available with information on how to manage your risks related to wildfire smoke on our website at [Islandhealth.ca](#).**

Q5. Are medications and medical supplies being rationed?

- **No. For Island Health facilities, we have plans in place to ensure the flow of supplies we require to maintain operations. We don’t anticipate any issues with that.**
- **We have reached out to the long-term care homes in the region west of the closure to check in and offer support, to ensure they have what they need for their residents.**
- **Regarding community supplies, Island Health has not been advised of any long-term supply chain challenges.**
- **People should check in with their primary care provider or pharmacist and see what steps they can take to prepare.**

Q6. What are you doing about homebound seniors? Will they continue to get care?

- **For people who are already connected to Island Health services, like home and community care, we continue to provide those services. There may be some situations where a visit is delayed or potentially postponed. We will follow our normal procedures for those situations and we ask for people’s patience and understanding as we work through this challenging situation. Essential visits are being prioritized.**
- **For people in the community who rely on support from family or loved ones out of the community, we would encourage those people to seek out support at the community level. If possible, identify someone in the community that can temporarily help.**
- **Check in on each other and check in on your neighbours, especially if you know there is someone who might need extra support in a situation like this. That is an important part of helping everyone get through this.**

- If you or someone you know needs support, we have options available through our Community Health Services access centre. Call 250-331-8570 or 1-866-928-4988 to get information and connection. There is no referral required. The access centre can also help connect people with other community-based services.
- We also have our Community Virtual Care program which can be accessed by calling 250-519-7700, ext. 11928.

Q7. How can I find information on potential travel supports for medical appointments and procedures?

- We encourage people to seek out community-based resources or provincial programs like the [Travel Assistance Program](#).
- We know many people are managing chronic disease and other health issues and it is important you continue to work with your health care providers. Talk to your provider about potential virtual care options or call 811 for advice from a trained professional.

Q8. What about people who have scheduled surgeries but won't be able to make it out of the west coast safely?

- Those types of procedures are scheduled by individual surgeon's offices based on their schedules.
- People should get in touch with their surgeon or specialist, or whoever scheduled their procedure, and see what options might be available.

Q9. Is this situation affecting people's ability to access treatment for mental health and substance use related challenges?

- In general, no. The same referral pathways are still in place and operating.
- If specific issues arise during the highway closure, we can work with our referring clinicians to explore solutions for patients who might require support to access treatment outside of community.
- The overdose prevention site continues to operate as normal in Port Alberni and we are working to make sure our local teams have all the support they need to maintain operations.
- People experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis can attend the nearest emergency department, call 911, or access the Vancouver Island Crisis Line, available 24/7 at 1-888-494-3888.
- Information and help navigating mental health, substance use and harm reduction services can be found by calling 1-888-885-8824.