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From: CLRInfo
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To: Ken McCormack
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Subject: COVID 19 Update - March 19

[CLR Members,](#)

Please find important updates on the COVID-19 situation:

[Front-line workers prioritized as COVID-19 vaccine rollout accelerates](#)

More than 300,000 front-line workers, including first responders, grocery store employees, and teachers and child care workers, will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations over the coming weeks as the Province's COVID-19 Immunization Plan moves forward ahead of schedule.

Beginning in April, people in priority groups identified by public health and the COVID-19 Workplace Task Group will start to receive their first dose of the AstraZeneca/SII COVISHIELD (AZ/SII) vaccine. These groups include:

- first responders (police, firefighters, emergency transport);
- K-12 educational staff;
- child care staff;
- grocery store workers;
- postal workers;
- bylaw and quarantine officers;
- manufacturing workers;
- wholesale/warehousing employees;
- staff living in congregate housing at places such as ski hills;
- correctional facilities staff; and
- cross-border transport staff.

In total, B.C. expects to receive approximately 340,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine by the end of May 2021. The Province will use a combination of community pharmacists, existing immunization clinics and mobile clinics at some worksites to administer the AstraZeneca vaccine to front-line workers.

The age-based vaccine rollout using the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is also accelerating and moving forward ahead of schedule. Currently, every senior born in 1941 or before (80 years old and over) and Indigenous peoples born in or before 1956 (65 years old and over) will be eligible to book a vaccination appointment by Friday, March 19, 2021.

The next age cohort is eligible to call as early as Saturday, March 20. The call centre approach through health authorities has now been extended to include those born between the years of 1942 to 1951 (79-70 year old) and Indigenous peoples born in 1966 and before (55 and over).

Everyone in B.C. who is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine will now be able to receive a first dose before July 1, 2021.

Workers, workplaces and industries prioritized in B.C.'s plan have been identified based on recommendations and input of a number of national and provincial groups, including the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, COVID-19 Workplace Task Group and B.C.'s Immunization Committee.

Learn More:

To view the March 18, 2021, PowerPoint presentations, visit:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/03.18.2021_COVID_Immunization_Plan.pdf

To learn about B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan and the Phase 2 rollout, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/bcseniorsfirst and: www.gov.bc.ca/covidvaccine

For technical immunization information, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control's website: www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine

For more information on what to expect when you go to get vaccinated for COVID-19, visit: www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine/getting-a-vaccine

[B.C.'s first batch of AstraZeneca headed for workers at food processing plants, industrial camps](#)

British Columbia will be allocating its first batch of the AstraZeneca vaccine to those it deems highest risk for the spread of COVID-19.

The province will deploy around 68,000 doses of the vaccine to areas that public health officials and WorkSafeBC have identified as the highest risk categories of worksites.

The vaccinations will take place at food processing plants, agricultural operations with congregate accommodations, large industrial camps with congregate accommodations, and other large congregate-living settings for workers.

"When B.C. initially launched its COVID-19 Immunization Plan, we were hopeful additional vaccines would be approved so we could allocate them to priority and front-line workers and industries ahead of Phase 3," provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and Health Minister Adrian Dix said in a joint statement on Monday.

"Now, the initial shipment of AZ/SII vaccine will be used to protect workers in industries where full use of personal protective equipment and barriers can be challenging, outbreaks and clusters have occurred or are ongoing, and workers must live or work in congregate settings."

[AstraZeneca: benefits still outweigh the risks, according to European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#)

EMA's safety committee, [PRAC](#) (Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee), concluded its preliminary review of a signal of blood clots in people vaccinated with COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca at its extraordinary meeting of 18 March 2021. The Committee confirmed that:

- the benefits of the vaccine in combating the still widespread threat of COVID-19 (which itself results in clotting problems and may be fatal) continue to outweigh the risk of side effects;
- the vaccine is not associated with an increase in the overall risk of blood clots (thromboembolic events) in those who receive it;
- there is no evidence of a problem related to specific batches of the vaccine or to particular manufacturing sites;
- however, the vaccine may be associated with very rare cases of blood clots associated with thrombocytopenia, i.e. low levels of blood platelets (elements in the blood that help it to clot) with or without bleeding, including rare cases of clots in the vessels draining blood from the brain (CVST).

The Committee was of the opinion that the vaccine's proven efficacy in preventing hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 outweighs the extremely small likelihood of developing blood clots (disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), and clots in the vessels draining blood from the brain (CVST)). However, in the light of its findings, patients should be aware of the remote possibility of such syndromes, and if symptoms suggestive of clotting problems occur patients should seek immediate medical attention and inform healthcare professionals of their recent vaccination. Steps are already being taken to update the product information for the vaccine to include more information on these risks.

The PRAC will undertake additional review of these risks, including looking at the risks with other types of COVID-19 vaccines (although no signal has been identified from monitoring so far). Close safety monitoring of reports of blood clotting disorders will continue, and further studies are being instituted to provide more laboratory data as well as real-world evidence. EMA will communicate further as appropriate.

State of emergency extended, marks one year of B.C.'s COVID-19 response

B.C. has formally extended the provincial state of emergency for the 26th time, marking a year since this declaration was issued in response to COVID-19.

This unprecedented, continued state of emergency allows health and emergency management officials to continue to use extraordinary powers under the Emergency Program Act (EPA) to support the Province's COVID-19 pandemic response.

The state of emergency is extended through the end of the day on March 30, 2021, to allow staff to take the necessary actions to keep British Columbians safe and manage immediate concerns and COVID-19 outbreaks.

This week, the Province marks a year since Dr. Bonnie Henry declared a public health emergency in response to COVID-19. The extension of the provincial state of emergency is based on recommendations from B.C.'s health and emergency management officials. The original declaration was made on March 18, 2020, the day after Henry declared a public health emergency.

The Province continues, with the support of police and other enforcement officials, to use measures under the EPA to limit the spread of COVID-19, including issuing tickets for owners, operators and event organizers who host an event or gathering contravening the PHO's orders.

On July 10, 2020, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act came into force, enabling provisions created for citizens and businesses in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to continue as needed should the provincial state of emergency end.

For information on all recent orders and guidance, as well as general COVID-19 information for all British Columbians, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/covid19

Variant-strain COVID-19 cases in B.C. on the rise

The B.C. government's data from Mar 16 shows that the total number of variant-strain COVID-19 cases has risen more than 530%, to 996, compared with March 1.

So far in B.C., none of the people infected with a mutant strain of the virus has died, while 130 people are actively battling infections, and 886 people are considered recovered because they have had two negative tests.

The B.1.1.7 variant, first discovered in the U.K. is the most widely spread variant in the province, as there are 921 cases. The remaining variants include 41 cases of the B.1.351 strain first discovered in South Africa, and 34 cases of the P.1. variant first discovered in Brazil.

B.C. health officials who have found variant cases did so by retesting samples previously reported as being the main COVID-19 strain. Sometimes the retesting of previously tested samples have gone back a few months, provincial health officer Bonnie Henry said earlier this week.

Minister's statement on February Labour Force Survey results

Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economy Recovery and Innovation, has issued the following statement on the release of Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey for February 2021:

"One year into this pandemic, British Columbia has returned to 99.4% of pre-pandemic employment levels. B.C.'s economy remains one of the strongest in Canada, having created jobs in each of the past 10 months."

"The Labour Force Survey for February shows B.C. added 26,600 jobs, with the majority of those jobs going to women. This dropped B.C.'s unemployment rate to 6.9% from 8.0% in January, the month before.

"In fact, employment in some parts of the province is above pre-pandemic levels. For example, Prince George is at 106.7% and Kamloops is at 103.3%.

"While this does not mean all sectors are back to full strength, it does mean that even as our tourism and hospitality sectors continue to struggle, our economy is growing."

[Government of Canada invests in new COVID-19 research projects across the country](#)

Mar 12, Canada's Minister of Health Patty Hajdu announced an investment of approximately \$25.2 million in 52 research projects to further improve understanding of COVID-19 and address persistent evidence gaps linked to this disease. Led by researchers across the country, the new COVID-19 projects will focus on topics such as variants of the virus, vaccine development and uptake, testing, mental health, and the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic is having specific impacts on women, racialized populations, and Métis, Inuit and First Nations Peoples. This investment will enable research teams to target priority areas and advance the knowledge and management of COVID-19 related issues. The findings will serve to provide decision-makers with guidance to improve the health of the Canadian populations.

The Government of Canada is providing the funding for this research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). This latest funding builds on [previous investments from CIHR](#) and complements a [recently launched competition](#) to further address persistent research gaps in the knowledge and emerging priorities related to COVID-19.

[The Province to increase funding for Launch Online Grant program](#)

The B.C. government is investing an additional \$30 million to help local businesses transition to online and e-commerce business. The Launch Online Grant program provides up to \$7,500 to businesses to help build or expand an e-commerce site. The province forecasts these changes will help approximately 4,000 more businesses market their products and services online.

“By expanding eligibility to our successful launch online program, more B.C. small businesses from the hardest-hit sectors will have access to the tools they need to boost their online presence, grow their e-commerce capacity and become more resilient as we build toward a brighter future,” Premier John Horgan said.

The new funding is in addition to the February 2021 announcement of \$12 million to support 1,500 businesses to enhance or establish their online presence. Currently, over 3,500 businesses from around the province have applied, demonstrating the need for these supports. As part of the eligibility enhancements, 30% of the grant funds will now be reserved for Black, Indigenous and people of colour-owned (BIPOC) businesses, as well as rural businesses. This is expanded from the original 25% of grant funds that were reserved for Indigenous and rural businesses.

As part of the program, successful applicants will work with local B.C. service providers to complete their online store. Through this model, the grant funding can be reinvested in B.C.-based marketing and technology companies to generate revenues for local companies and help secure and grow jobs.

The Launch Online Grant program is part of StrongerBC: BC's Economic Recovery Plan.

The program is administered by Alacrity Canada. Small and medium-sized businesses can apply online: www.launchonline.ca

Learn More:

For more information on the Launch Online Grant program, including the application process and eligibility, visit: www.launchonline.ca

For more information on StrongerBC, visit: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>

For more information on Alacrity Canada, visit: <https://www.alacritycanada.com/>

[Support to workers and families increases with the passage of EI legislation and the coming into effect of recovery benefit regulations](#)

The federal government put forward legislation to increase the maximum number of weeks available to workers through EI regular benefits. Mar 17, this legislation, Bill C-24, received Royal Assent. Workers claiming EI regular benefits can now access up to a maximum of 50 weeks for claims established between September 27, 2020 to September 25, 2021.

In addition, self-employed workers who have opted in to the EI program to access special benefits are now able to use a 2020 earnings threshold of \$5,000, compared to the previous threshold of \$7,555. This change is retroactive for claims established as of January 3, 2021 and applies until September 25, 2021.

As part of this legislation, all international travelers who need to quarantine or isolate upon their return to Canada, including people returning from vacation, are ineligible to receive support from any of the recovery benefits for the period of their mandatory quarantine or isolation. These changes are retroactive to October 2, 2020.

As previously announced, individuals who would normally be exempt from the mandatory quarantine requirements under the Quarantine Act, such as health care workers who need to cross the border for work or truck drivers, are still eligible to apply following their return to the country. An exemption also applies to those who travel to receive a necessary medical treatment or to accompany someone who is travelling for such treatment and requires assistance.

In addition to Bill C-24, new regulations to increase the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Benefits have come into effect. This includes an increase in the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB) by 12 weeks, extending the maximum duration of the benefits from 26 weeks to 38 weeks. It also includes an increase in the number of weeks available under the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) from 2 weeks to 4 weeks. Individuals can access these additional weeks through the Canada Revenue Agency beginning on March 18, 2021.

Provincial stats

The information below is current as of 3pm on Thursday, March 18, 2021:

- New cases: 622
- Total cases: 90,049
- Deaths in last 24 hours: 8
- Total deaths: 1,419
- Total recoveries: 83,613

Stay safe.

Ken McCormack | President & CEO

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