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From: CLRInfo
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To: Ken McCormack
Cc: Paul Strangway; Joleen Kaminski
Subject: COVID 19 Update - March 5, 2021

Importance: High

[CLR Members,](#)

Your news and updates on the COVID-19 situation:

[Provincial update](#)

B.C. health officials reported 564 new cases of COVID-19 on Thursday, along with four additional deaths. At a live briefing, provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said it left B.C. with 4,743 active cases. Another 8,659 people were isolating due to potential exposure. B.C. reported 46 new cases of the COVID-19 variants of concern, a total of 246 so far. 218 of those were the U.K. variant, while 28 were the B.1.351 first identified in South Africa. The province says it still does not know the origin of about 25% of those cases.

B.C. has administered at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine to 212,105 people, about 4.1% of the population, while 86,746 people have had both a first and second dose. The province announced Monday it would wait up to four months to administer second doses, allowing everyone who wants a shot to have one by the end of July.

[B.C. moves to Phase 2 of COVID-19 immunization plan, protects seniors](#)

More than 400,000 people in British Columbia will be immunized from March to early April as the Province moves into Phase 2 of the immunization rollout.

Those in Phase 2 receiving their first vaccine dose in March and early April include:

- seniors and high-risk people residing in independent living and seniors' supportive housing (including staff);
- home-care support clients and staff;
- Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit) peoples born in or before 1956 (65 years and older); and
- seniors born in or before 1941 (80 years and older).

In mid-April, Phase 3 will begin with mass vaccination of people aged 79 to 60 years, and people aged 16+ who are extremely clinically vulnerable, at community immunization clinics throughout B.C. Mobile clinics will be available in some rural communities and for people who are homebound due to mobility issues.

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.

[State of emergency extended to continue B.C.'s COVID-19 response](#)

The Province of British Columbia has formally extended the provincial state of emergency, allowing 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 16, 2021, to allow staff to take the necessary actions to keep British Columbians safe and manage immediate concerns and COVID-19 outbreaks.

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 Dr. Bonnie 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 to 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.

[Johnson & Johnson vaccine approval expected shortly](#)

Canadian public health officials say they are confident regulators are on track to approve the Johnson & Johnson one-shot coronavirus vaccine within a matter of days.

Dr. Marc Berthiaume, director of the bureau of medical science at Health Canada, said during a press conference on Thursday that he expects there will be good news on the approval of that vaccine shortly.

Earlier in the week, Health Canada's chief medical advisor Dr. Supriya Sharma had said the review of the vaccine candidate was "progressing very well." Sharma said the regulator had been waiting on a last piece of manufacturing data from Johnson & Johnson as part of that application review, and received that on Saturday.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine differs from the others approved so far in that it delivers a high level of protection from developing COVID-19 symptoms with a single dose rather than two.

Clinical trial data suggests the vaccine has an overall efficacy rate of 66%. But that rate rises to 88% when it comes to how well the vaccine prevents severe illness and hospitalization because of COVID-19, which is a key metric.

Canada has a contract in place for 38 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, with one million of those expected to be delivered by September.

[Canada to receive 2 million doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India](#)

Following Health Canada's authorization of the AstraZeneca ChAdOx1 COVID-19 vaccine, the Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Public Services and Procurement, announced Feb 26 that Canada has secured 2 million doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine through an agreement with Verity Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc./Serum Institute of India.

AstraZeneca has licensed the manufacture of its ChAdOx1 vaccine to the Serum Institute. The first 500,000 doses will be delivered to Canada in the coming weeks and will quickly be ready for distribution to the provinces and territories. The remaining 1.5 million doses will arrive by mid-May.

The 2 million doses secured through this agreement are in addition to the 20 million doses already secured through an earlier agreement with AstraZeneca. Health Canada's authorization of the AstraZeneca vaccine allows the Government of Canada to advance its work with AstraZeneca to finalize delivery schedules for the 20 million doses.

This announcement further solidifies Canada's plan to be able to provide a vaccine to everyone in Canada for whom these COVID-19 vaccines are recommended, by the end of September.

[Business recovery grant program extended](#)

The B.C. government has extended the deadline for the Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant program to ensure businesses have the time they need to apply.

One of the main requirements has also been lowered to ensure more businesses are eligible.

The time to apply for the Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant program has been extended from March 31, 2021, to Aug. 31, 2021. The previous requirement for a business to have experienced at least a 70% revenue loss at some point in March or April 2020 has been adjusted. Now, a business is required to demonstrate only a 30% revenue loss in any one month between March 2020 to the point of application. The \$345-million Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant program provides fully funded grants to businesses that employ up to 149 B.C. residents. Grants of \$10,000 to a maximum of \$30,000 are available, with up to an additional \$5,000 to \$15,000 available to tourism-related businesses.

[Wage and rent subsidy amounts to remain unchanged through to June](#)

Mar 3, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, announced that the government intends to extend the current rate structures for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Lockdown Support from March 14 to June 5, 2021. Specifically:

- the maximum wage subsidy rate for active employees would remain at 75%;
- the maximum rent subsidy rate would remain at 65%; and
- Lockdown Support would remain at 25% and continue to be provided in addition to the rent subsidy, providing eligible hard hit businesses with rent support of up to 90%.

With regard to furloughed workers (employees on leave with full or partial pay), the government intends to continue to align the wage subsidy rate structure with the benefits provided through the Employment Insurance program from March 14 to June 5, 2021. This means employers who qualify for the wage subsidy would be able to continue to claim up to a maximum benefit of \$595 per week per employee to support remuneration of their furloughed workers.

Through the pandemic, applicants have demonstrated revenue declines by comparing revenue to the previous year. Given that we are approaching a full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced that applicants would be able to continue to use a pre-pandemic 2019 reference month, effective for the upcoming periods from March 14 to June 5, 2021. Further details are in the [backgrounder](#).

[Continued support for employers receiving CEWS](#)

WorkSafeBC is continuing to waive premiums for employers who are approved to receive the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) for furloughed workers.

In support of this, a [2021 worksheet](#) is available for employers to calculate the amounts to exclude from assessable payroll for furloughed workers who were eligible for a CEWS subsidy for the 2021 claim periods. Employers need to maintain documentation to identify workers who were furloughed as a result of this provincial health emergency.

More resources:

- [2021 WorkSafeBC Assessable Earnings Reduction Calculation](#)
- [2020 WorkSafeBC Assessable Earnings Reduction Calculation](#)

[Economic rebound predicted for 2021-22](#)

The Province can expect a slight rebound and moderate growth in the economy in 2021 with further growth in 2022, following unprecedented economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new projections from the Economic Forecast Council.

The council estimates B.C.'s real gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 5.1% in 2020, and predicts growth of 4.7% in 2021 and 4.3% in 2022.

Since the economic low point of the pandemic in April 2020, British Columbia has had nine consecutive months of job growth. The province's unemployment rate remains above pre-pandemic levels but is below the national average. The

Province has retained its status as the only province with triple-A credit ratings by the three international ratings agencies, further signalling prudent fiscal management.

At the onset of the pandemic, the B.C. government responded to support people, businesses and communities, through measures like worker benefits, income and disability assistance top-ups, and temporary tax reductions and deferrals. In September 2020, the Province announced targeted investments through the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan to help get British Columbians back to work, while supporting the infrastructure, services and shared growth needed for B.C.'s economic recovery.

The Economic Forecast Council discussed current events and issues affecting British Columbia's economy and forecasts, including:

- COVID-19 impacts over the short and medium term, as well as industry-specific impacts, gender-based analysis and other intersections across the economy;
- government policies to support economic recovery and maintain fiscal discipline;
- policies and vaccination timelines in B.C., Canada and the rest of the world;
- housing affordability and resilience in homebuying;
- LNG and other industry opportunities; and
- uncertainty surrounding the global outlook and restrictions around trade.

The Economic Forecast Council consists of 13 independent forecasters from banks, financial institutions and independent organizations across Canada. The council gathers once a year with the minister of finance to offer economic advice in advance of each year's budget and fiscal plan.

The council's economic forecasts will be presented with the B.C. government's updated forecasts in Budget 2021.

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

For information about BC's Restart Plan, visit: <http://gov.bc.ca/restartbc>

Stay safe.

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