

Dec 10, 2021

To: Comox Valley Local Health Area Communities

Re: Increased COVID-19 activity in Comox Valley Local Health Area

Over the past three weeks, there has been an uptick in detected COVID-19 cases in the Comox Valley Local Health Area. This has understandably resulted in anxiety for many community members. I would like to provide some reassurance for you. The current cases are occurring against a background of a highly vaccinated population. Community cases do not mean the same now as they did in the pre-vaccine phase of the pandemic. The majority of cases are linked to known cases and clusters, many are the result of close contact within households and hospitalization rates remain low.

The current number of community cases are not unexpected for a variety of reasons:

1. We were largely able to avoid spread of the virus in the initial waves of the pandemic through our public health measures and later through immunization,
2. There is little natural immunity from previous infection at a population level, and
3. The current dominant strain, Delta variant, is much more transmissible and especially problematic for those who are unvaccinated.

The purpose of COVID-19 vaccine is not to eliminate infections, rather to decrease the likelihood of severe disease, hospitalizations and death if a person becomes infected. A large percentage of fully vaccinated people will not get COVID-19 when exposed to someone who is infectious. For the small number of fully vaccinated people who do become symptomatic from COVID-19 infection, they will most likely have mild symptoms and are less able to transmit the virus to others.

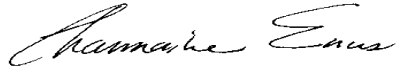
Public health recommendations are evolving as we move to new phases of this pandemic. Fully vaccinated close contacts are no longer asked to self-isolate, instead they are asked to self-monitor for symptoms and get tested if symptoms develop. We encourage fully vaccinated close contacts to return to normal daily activities such as going to school and work if they do not have symptoms. Public health professionals follow-up with all cases and will provide recommendations and direction as required. Essentially, if you are not directed to self-isolate or seek testing and you are not experiencing symptoms, you can carry on with life as normal!

Congratulations to everyone who has stepped up to get immunized and the health-care teams who have helped make it happen. Over 96 percent of the population 70 years and older in the Comox Valley Local Health Area have received at least one dose of vaccine and 93 percent are fully vaccinated. For the population 12 years and up, 90 percent have received one dose of vaccine and 85 percent are fully vaccinated. Well done! Immunization clinics for kids age 5 - 11 years old are underway now.

For adults who are not vaccinated, COVID-19 remains a serious infection and deserves your respect. Unvaccinated adults are eight times more likely to become infected, 32 times more likely to be hospitalized and 52 times more likely to require critical care. I strongly urge unvaccinated adults to not only consider their own health but the health of their loved ones, friends and community by limiting the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission through being vaccinated.

Experience from other regions has shown that the uptick in cases will subside, but it is important to know that we will continue to hear of cases in our communities. We can learn to live with this virus as we have done with other vaccine-preventable respiratory infections by getting vaccinated, staying home when ill with fever and cough and following current public health guidance and recommendations.

Yours in health,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charmaine Enns".

Charmaine Enns, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer