



April 16, 2021

Ref: 266177

Mayors and Regional District Chairs of British Columbia
Attendees of April 2021 Regional Calls with Minister Josie Osborne and Dr. Martin Lavoie

Dear Mayors and Chairs,

Thank you for taking the time to join Minister Josie Osborne and Deputy Provincial Health Officer Dr. Martin Lavoie for the April 2021 regional calls. As Minister Osborne and Dr. Lavoie said, these conversations continue to be a great opportunity to hear from you about the key issues and opportunities that you are working on in your communities.

COVID-19 Update

As you are aware, Dr. Henry announced stronger [province-wide restrictions](#), put in place to significantly reduce COVID-19 transmissions related to social interactions and travel. These stronger province-wide restrictions are currently in place until **April 19 at 11:59 pm** to act as a “circuit breaker” to protect people and communities.

Dr. Henry reminds us that there are **no indoor gatherings of any size** at your residence with anyone other than your household or, if you live alone, your core bubble. There are some exceptions that allow for people who provide services and certain types of events that can be held indoors – more information is available in the [Order](#) (see Section A part 2 and Section D). However, the intention of the Order is to restrict social gatherings as much as possible.

Non-essential travel should not be happening right now, with strong recommendations to keep to your own neighbourhood. Indoor low intensity group exercise classes are cancelled. Restaurants, pubs, and bars are closed for indoor dining. Outdoor patio seating and take-out delivery is allowed.

The PHO strongly recommends working from home whenever possible and getting tested immediately if you or anyone in your family is feeling sick. Workplaces with a COVID-19 exposure may be ordered to [close for a minimum of 10 days](#).

On April 15, 2021 Dr. Bonnie Henry and Minister of Health, Adrian Dix, released a [joint statement on BC's COVID-19 response](#). Please stay tuned for further announcements from Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and check the [provincial government COVID-19 website](#) regularly for more information.

COVID-19 Immunization Plan and Vaccine Roll Out

Please see below a summary of the most commonly asked questions and Dr. Lavoie's answers with respect to the COVID-19 immunization plan and vaccine roll out that were raised during the calls.

Q: How can local governments support the immunization roll out?

A: *Regional health authorities will rely on local governments to provide space, information, and communication support, as needed. Local governments can support vaccine uptake, including by getting the message out to their own staff. As the needs and roles will look different in different communities, please connect with your local health authority to learn how you can help.*

Q: Where can we find reliable/correct information with respect to the immunization plan and vaccine roll out?

- [BC's COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#)
- [Province-Wide Restrictions](#)
- [PHO Orders](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) (information, data, exposures)
- [Regional health authority websites](#)
- 8-1-1 (HealthLinkBC)
- 1-888-COVID19 for non-medical COVID-19 questions
- [Government of Canada](#)

Q: Why are vaccination clinics not running 24/7 to get as many people vaccinated as possible in a short period of time?

A: *There is currently not enough vaccine available to run clinics all the time; the provincial government is distributing vaccines as quickly as possible once they are received.*

It should be noted that this is the largest ever immunization program in B.C.'s history; it is ahead of schedule and will be aided by 1,400 former tourism and hospitality workers who are being trained to work in mass-vaccination clinics

Q: Why is there an increase in the interval to the second dose?

A: *Evidence shows the first dose gives a very high level of protection and that protection lasts for many months. By focusing on administering the first dose, it means we can move everybody up the list and more people will be protected much sooner. The second dose will be administered once everyone has received their first dose which we expect to start doing around mid-June (up to 4 months after that first dose, and as more doses become available and the campaign accelerates, that interval will be getting shorter, down to about 8 weeks towards the end of the campaign).*

Q: Is there data of the specific percentage of people vaccinated in a community available?

A: *The [BC COVID-19 Dashboard](#) provides data of vaccine doses administered broken down by health authority and vaccine type. Local health authorities may also have percentages at the regional level, but generally don't have the data for each community. There is also a provincial average available at the Government of Canada [COVID-19 vaccination in Canada](#) website that is updated on a regular basis. Additional information on coverage may become available publicly as the campaign progresses.*

Q: Will municipal public works staff, including water and sewer maintenance workers, be included in the “essential workers” list for prioritized immunization?

A: *The front-line priority workers immunization program is currently **on hold** due to the safety concerns surrounding the AstraZeneca vaccine. Dr. Lavoie and his team are hoping that the program can resume in the near future, depending on vaccine availability. If the program resumes, local health authorities will contact employers of workers identified for priority vaccines with respect to registration information for staff.*

Dr. Lavoie has indicated that he appreciates the concerns regarding local government public works staff, especially in smaller communities where only a limited number of staff are available to carry out essential services’ work and he will pass along these concerns to his colleagues for consideration of adding such staff to the program when it resumes. At the same time, Dr. Lavoie has noted that workers included to date for priority vaccination were identified as such for a number of reasons, including the nature of their work but also the extent to which they could protect themselves (e.g. using PPE; limiting public interactions, etc.). As well, Dr. Lavoie noted that the vaccine roll out for the general population is rapidly accelerating and that everyone in BC eligible to receive the vaccine will be offered their first dose by mid-June.

Q: Can people choose a vaccine?

A: *The vaccine available at vaccination clinics depends on vaccine availability, regional demographics, and logistics considerations. Some clinics may have more than one kind of vaccine available while others won’t. Individuals are strongly advised to accept the vaccine they are offered to avoid the higher risk of transmission that comes with vaccine delay, recognizing that whether or not to be vaccinated is ultimately a personal decision. Currently, the most commonly used vaccines at vaccination clinics are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Choices about which vaccine(s) each clinic will be using are made by health authorities; please connect with your local health authority for more detailed information regarding the vaccine(s) used in your community during the vaccination clinic.*

Q: What is the provincial government’s response to the concerns around the AstraZeneca vaccine?

A: *Based on guidance from Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the Province is temporarily suspending the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for people under age 55 until further notice and information is available.*

Dr. Lavoie reiterated that all vaccines approved by Health Canada, including the AstraZeneca vaccine, are safe, effective, and provide excellent protection against severe illness and death caused by COVID-19. Vaccines do more than protect the people getting vaccinated; they also protect everyone around them. The more people in a community who are immunized and protected from COVID-19, the harder it is for COVID-19 to spread.

Q: When will restrictions be lifted?

A: *We want to have as many people immunized as possible to reach “community immunity” -- 65 to 85 % of people. So far, most people want to get the vaccine and we strongly encourage everyone who is eligible to register and get vaccinated. If “community immunity” is not reached, this could prolong*

restrictions, and the PHO will keep monitoring further developments. Keep in mind that people who are vaccinated are protected, however, they could still get infected, and transmit the virus. People that are not immunized are not protected and could get very sick or die. Therefore, to keep everybody safe, restrictions must be maintained at the moment.

Note that Dr. Lavoie's power point presentation sent to call participants via email in advance of the calls provides an overview and additional information about the immunization plan and vaccines and may be shared with your local government and staff. Information written for the public is available from other sources (such as the BCCDC website).

Strengthening Communities' Services Funding

We would like to thank all local governments who have applied for the [Strengthening Communities' Services Funding](#); applications for the program are closing today. UBCM will be processing all applications and approval announcements are expected in late Spring 2021.

Local Government Development Approvals Program

The Local Government Development Approvals Program supports the implementation of established best practices and tests innovative approaches to improve development approvals processes while meeting local government planning and policy objectives. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has provided funding for this program and UBCM is administering the program on behalf of the provincial government. **Applications are currently accepted for this program and the application deadline is May 7, 2021.** More information can be found [here](#).

Note that the power point presentation regarding the Local Government Development Approvals Program sent to call participants via email in advance of the calls also provides an overview and additional information about the program.

Circuit Breaker Business Relief Grant

On April 8, 2021 the provincial government announced a [new relief grant for hospitality and fitness businesses](#) that will provide more than \$50 million to help the 14,000 restaurants, bars, breweries, wineries, gyms and fitness centres affected by the March 30, 2021, provincial health orders. The new Circuit Breaker Business Relief Grant will provide affected businesses with up to \$10,000 in one-time funding to help with expenses like rent, insurance, employee wages, maintenance, and utilities. The grant can also help cover unexpected costs that resulted from the restrictions, such as the purchase of perishable goods.

The Circuit Breaker Business Relief Grant is open to eligible businesses of any size that have been in operation as of Feb. 1, 2021. To ensure affected businesses can access the funds quickly, the Circuit Breaker Business Relief Grant has a streamlined application. For more information on the Circuit Breaker Business Relief Grant, including the application process and eligibility, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/business-relief. **Applications opened the week of April 12, 2021.** We encourage you to share this information directly with affected businesses in your community.

Note that the [Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant](#) has also been **extended to August 31, 2021** or until funds are fully expended, whichever comes first.

Property Tax, School Tax Deferment

There are no planned provincial extensions to the 2021 tax deadlines and remittances for property tax and school tax. The measures taken in 2020 (e.g. reserve borrowing; extending revenue anticipation borrowing along with Restart Grants) were aimed at injecting necessary liquidity into the local government finance system for 2020 and 2021. Local governments are encouraged to maintain a strong level of cash assets, prioritize core municipal operations, and possibly defer non-essential capital expenditures until the COVID-19 pandemic no longer poses a threat to public health.

If individual local governments want to delay tax due dates, they can do so through an alternative tax scheme under the Community Charter. There is no formal deadline for the alternative tax scheme, however, the tax due date must be set in the tax notice. Therefore, an alternative tax scheme must be in place before tax notices are sent out. Note that individual property owners must opt into the alternative tax scheme when it establishes a tax due date after July 2; otherwise the general scheme applies.

The 2021 submission deadlines for financial reports also revert to the dates stipulated in legislation. If you have concerns meeting reporting deadlines for audited financial statements, Local Government Data Entry (LGDE) forms, and/or Statement of Financial Information (SOFI), please contact Ministry of Municipal Affairs staff to discuss possible options. Local governments cannot be late with budgets, requisitions, and tax rate bylaws as these are required for legal collection of 2021 tax revenues.

Your staff can reach out to Ministry of Municipal Affairs staff for assistance (see the [Local Government Division staff finder](#) for the appropriate staff person for your area) on issues and questions specific to your community.

The next regional calls will be in May and ministry staff will be in contact with you regarding dates/times and format of these calls. Please let us know of any standing meetings in your region that you are attending on a regular basis (send an email to MUNI.Minister@gov.bc.ca) so that we can take these events into account in our scheduling. If you are unable to attend the minister's call, please feel free to send an alternate elected official or staff member to attend on your behalf.

Mayors and Regional District Chairs
Page 6

Thank you again for participating in the calls and we look forward to connecting with you in May.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "T. Faganello". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

Tara Faganello
Assistant Deputy Minister

pc: Chief Administrative Officers
Gary MacIsaac, Executive Director, UBCM
Nancy Taylor, Executive Director, LGMA
Todd Pugh, Executive Director, CivicInfo