

Special Thanks to the Revelstoke Mountaineer for submitting many excellent questions!

COVID is present in our community. We have been fortunate to enjoy a prolonged period with no cases but that has now changed. This is the time to ensure that everyone is following Public Health guidelines. As of 3pm November 19th BC's restrictions are extended throughout the entire province:

- *Mandatory masks in all indoor public and retail spaces*
- *Restriction of social gatherings to household members only*
- *No non-essential travel*

Ask yourself: if you develop symptoms of COVID-19 tomorrow, how many people would you have been in contact with during the 48 hours prior to symptom onset? The smaller that number the slower the virus can spread, the less people will need to self-isolate due to exposure, the fewer businesses and livelihoods impacted, the easier the job for contact tracers.

REVELSTOKE COMMUNITY

#1 Are the Revelstoke November 2020 cases considered public exposures that will be included on the BCCDC notification website? *We do not run the BCCDC site and our utilization of the data available on this accessible, public interface is the same as anyone else's. Our understanding is that exposure events are only posted if the provincial contact tracers cannot get a hold of every close contact.*

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/public-exposures>

The Revelstoke Local Health Area (LHA) statistics on resident cases are currently only released by the Interior Health Authority once a month. The last update came on November 12 for the month of October, and showed no resident cases in the Revelstoke LHA for October. The November numbers will be posted in mid-December. The numbers include cases for residents of the LHA, but not visitors who reside elsewhere. Official, up to date, community case information does not come to physicians in BC, and we develop a sense of the local infection burden from the media and when individual patients share their confidential stories and/or results with us

#2 Are you able to provide statistics about the average number of people getting tested for COVID in Revelstoke on a weekly basis over the past two weeks or the past month? *No. This information is not given to us. The BCCDC Dashboard provide these states for total province or total health authority levels.*

<https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/11bd9b0303c64373b5680df29e5b5914>

#3 From a medical perspective what are doctors in Revelstoke seeing the larger community doing right when it comes to lessening the risk of COVID exposure? *Many local businesses and social establishments have acted quickly in the past few days: some restaurants closing, some restaurants moving back to take-out service only, social events being cancelled or post-poned, businesses re-iterating requests for all patrons to wear masks, hand sanitize and stay distanced in the public space. Tourism Revelstoke and RMR announced a suspension of advertisement targeting out-of-town visitors. Our Mayor continues to encourage adherence to all provincial guidelines. There are so many excellent examples of leaders in our community following the science, choosing and accepting near-term pain to protect the community and protect our health*

care capacity, to buckle down and focus on measures that will hold our health and economy in reserve until this pandemic is over.

#4 What could members of the public do better or improve on to lessen the spread of COVID in the community? *The BC Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Henry, made this very clear on November 19th, and this mandate has our full support:*

- 1. there should not be an unmasked face or un-sanitized hand in any public setting in this town.*
- 2. Social gatherings must now be limited to household members only*

GETTING A COVID-19 TEST

#5 Is the Revelstoke Health Centre COVID Testing and Assessment Clinic the only place people can get tested for COVID? *Yes, the Revelstoke COVID Test Site is the only outpatient testing centre. The only other place is in the QVH ER, and this latter option is utilized for patients registered in the hospital i.e. people who are sick enough that they also need an in-depth evaluation by a doctor in the ER. In that case, a COVID test is likely to be included as part of a number of tests that may be ordered for that person.*

People with mild symptoms who need to be tested should go to the COVID Testing Sites, not an emergency department. ERs are for urgent or emergency care needs only.

If you are wondering where the most appropriate place to seek care is, or you are not sure if you need a COVID test, or need to simply speak to a doctor or nurse:

- Contact your physician's office to request a virtual appointment by phone or video*
- Contact Selkirk Medical Clinic for a same-day 'walk-in' appointment 250-837-2131*
- Call 811 to speak to a nurse in BC*
- Use the COVID assessment online tool or app
<https://www.thrive.health/bc-self-assessment-tool>*

#6 Where is the clinic located? *1200 Newlands Rd at Queen Victoria Hospital (QVH). A Public Health Nurse will either come to your parked car to administer the test, or give you instructions about which door to come to in the building, depending on your situation.*

#7 Can people just go to the clinic or do they need to call ahead first? *It will not work to just go to the Testing Site. You must register online or by phone first in order to activate your file and generate the lab requisition required to process the test.*

Online booking: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/Pages/default.aspx> Click on the right side of the screen 'Book a COVID-19 Test' to go through the registration

*Telephone booking: 1-877-740-7747 ****THIS IS A NEW NUMBER**** Someone will help you with the registration.*

There are no barriers to being tested. Even if you don't have a care card # or a stable address, you can still register and be tested.

#8 What days/times is the clinic open? *The Revelstoke testing site has always been open every day including weekends, from 9:30 – 11:30am. The hours are extended to meet demand when the number of bookings increases. This can change on a daily, or even hourly basis.*

#9 For some people the nasal swab test looks scary and/or painful. Can you explain how the test is performed? What are some things people can do to lessen their anxieties or fears around getting tested? *The nasal swab is a little uncomfortable, it's true. It involves a small Q-tip (about ½ the width of a regular Q-tip) being inserted up to the top of one nostril, as high as it goes. It might make you sneeze and make your eyes water for a few seconds. Most health care workers have been tested multiple times! We get it! It is worth the short term discomfort to mitigate the consequences of passing COVID-19 through the community, or having to isolate unnecessarily if you actually test negative.*

#10 Is it possible to have the new gargle test instead? How this test is performed? *Anyone of any age that can follow the instructions to do the gargle test may now have the gargle test. Children under 3 or adults with certain physical or cognitive disabilities may not be able to perform the gargle test. It is currently recommended that pregnant women and residents of long term care facilities continue to do the nasal swab test.*

You must have nothing in your mouth for 1 hr prior to doing the gargle test: no food/drink/gum/smoke/vape/toothpaste/toothpick. NOTHING. If you do, the accuracy of the test is compromised.

The gargle test involves swishing, gargling and spitting saline into a specimen container 3 times. It takes about 30s to perform.

The nasal swab takes a little less time, and you do not need to avoid oral intake for 1 hr like you do for the gargle test. If someone tries the gargle test and it is unable to do it, a nasal swab will be offered instead.

The nasal swab can also test for influenza or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), while the gargle test can only test for COVID-19.

#11 When did the gargle test become available in Revelstoke? *It became available to adults on November 18. It became available for children in Revelstoke in September*

#12 Do adults need to request this test or have a specific reason or condition to have the gargle test instead of the nasal swab? *The options of nasal swab or gargle test will be presented to all people who come through the BC Test Sites now. Anyone can request it. We have been told the gargle test has the same accuracy as the nasal swab when performed properly. Currently, the gargle test is NOT available in Interior Health Emergency Departments and we do not have information about whether this is anticipated in future.*

#13 Do you think more adults who are exhibiting possible COVID symptoms they might see as “minor” get tested if they were able to access the gargle test? *Maybe! We have found most people requiring testing in the ER to be very understanding. The Revelstoke Public Health nurses at the COVID Testing and Assessment Clinic do the lion's share of the testing though, are doing an incredible job, are working very hard, and would be the best to comment on that. We all owe them a massive round of applause. Send flowers to the Public Health nurses.*

#14 Is there any concern over the amount of time it takes for test results to come back? (For example if I am exhibiting COVID symptoms and get tested, during the time it takes for those results to come back other people I may have come into contact with might continue with their lives and unknowingly expose others to the virus). *Test results should be available in 48 hrs. We have seen earlier. Currently as testing is spiking it is practical to expect longer wait times for results as the labs receive more and more samples. As this point we have not noticed significant slowdowns.*

Your COVID test results should be made available to you via:

- *you're 'My Health Portal' account*
- *the text service you can sign up for at registration*
- *the 1-800 number given to you at registration*

If it seems your test result is taking longer than expected the top 2 reasons for this would be:

- *test results turn-around at the lab has slowed due to high volumes*
- *your result is POSITIVE. In some cases it seems positive results have taken longer to be posted and a provincial contact tracer calls you first.*

Your family doctor will also be sent a copy of your result. Your family doctor will very likely call you if they see a positive result appear in your medical chart.

If you are waiting for a COVID-19 test result you MUST be in self-isolation while you wait.

While you wait please consider sharing your status with close contacts immediately so they can increase their own vigilance right away.

STAYING HEALTHY

#15 Is there anything I can do to improve my own immune system while this virus is going around?

You bet! If you've been looking for the motivation to be your best health, there is no time so uniquely like the present. Get enough sleep and hydration. Kick that nicotine addiction. Reduce your alcohol consumption. Keep exercising! (in a safe, socially distanced way). Maintain a healthy weight, lose the excess pounds. For those with diabetes, hypertension and other chronic health conditions, see your doctor to make sure all options for optimal management are in play.

Take Vitamin D supplements. All of us northerners are probably Vitamin D deficient – we don't get enough sunlight for many months of the year. There is more and more research showing a link between Vitamin D deficiency and severity of COVID-19 symptoms.

Infant – Age 1 need 400 – 1000 IU daily

Ages 1 – 8 600 – 2500 IU daily

Ages 9 – adult need 1000 – 4000 IU daily.

#16 I think I am struggling with my mental health. 2020 is really getting to me, and I'm not sure where to turn. *You are not alone.*

Revelstokelife.ca is a local website with a wealth of information regarding social, community, health and mental-health resources to point you in the right direction. <http://www.revelstokelife.ca> This is an excellent place to start.

As your family doctors, we are happy to support and help where-ever you may be in your personal journey.

MASKS

#17 Mask wearing is a hot topic of discussion for some. What exactly does wearing a non-medical mask do? Can you explain the purpose of wearing a non-medical mask and how it protects you and others? A face covering of any type will significantly reduce the transmission of large droplets ex: cough, sneeze, forceful speaking, spittle, spray. This graphic illustrates nicely.



Medical grade masks are better than non-medical ones. Medical masks are not widely available to all people and those that are need to be reserved for high risk essential workers. The better your mask the greater the benefit but even cloth masks likely decrease the amount of viral particles you are exposed to. There is some evidence that the severity of infection is related to the actual amount of virus you breathe in at the time of initial infection.

2m is the recommended distance you should keep away from others but in certain situations 2m is not enough. COVID is transmitted through droplets and sometimes aerosols. Singing, yelling, loud talking, heavy breathing (eg exercise), coughing, and sneezing all can create more of these droplets and aerosols. Enclosed spaces increase your risk of getting exposed. The longer you spend with someone the higher the chance of transmission so keep interactions short.

We should all wear a mask as much as possible when out of the house - you never know when you will come into close contact with someone that has COVID. It is easy. It is not harmful (feeling frustrated about wearing a mask is not considered a harm). Masks primarily protect other people from the wearer. If you are sick with COVID you will start shedding virus particles up to 48 hours prior to showing symptoms. Some people will show no or minimal symptoms - this is why this pandemic has been so difficult to control.

#18 What should people look for in a mask and how can they tell if it is fitting properly? *The science behind mask wearing has accelerated. A cloth mask does offer protection to you from others as well. How well it protects you from breathing in the virus likely depends on the fabrics used and how your mask is made (e.g. the type of fabric, the number of layers of fabric, how well the mask fits). The CDC is currently studying these factors. The Public Health Agency of Canada is now recommending that non-medical masks have 3 layers of fabric, including a filter layer.*

A mask that is too tight, too loose, has large gaps along the sides, or keeps falling off your nose or crawling up your chin when you talk is a mask that does not fit. You should not have to repeatedly adjust your mask when it is on your face. Every time you touch your mask you should immediately hand sanitize afterwards.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

#19 If people are using medical masks how often should they change them? *You will need to use your judgement to determine this. If you were in a more crowded setting with many people and unable to physically distance, you should change your mask after carefully removing it and hand sanitizing. Wear a fresh one for the next encounter.*

#20 How often should they wash the masks? *Technically, after every use.*

#21 Anything else?!

Well, as we start getting more cases in our community it is very important to monitor yourself for symptoms. COVID can present with a wide variety of symptoms and sometimes these symptoms can be very mild. The BCCDC webpage (www.bccdc.ca) is a great resource and a list of possible symptoms is available there. If you have symptoms take them seriously, self-isolate and get tested. This is not the time to downplay symptoms as "just a cold". We know this individually may be a financial burden (both for employees and employers) but collectively it makes a difference so please do your part to slow the spread of this virus.

We cannot presume that the steps we took this summer will be enough to prevent COVID-19 escalation now that winter is here. As evidenced by the rapid spread of cases in the northern hemisphere over the past month COVID is a seasonal virus. Due to factors such as temperature, humidity & human behaviour this is a much more prevalent and infectious foe we are facing now and we need to step up our response to overcome it. This is why the BC Provincial Health Office brought the hammer down today.

The battle we are fighting is one that everyone plays a role in. Your individual actions are the building blocks which our defence is dependent on.

Thank you Revelstoke for all you've done to keep COVID under control so far and keep up the good effort so we can make it through the winter safe and sound!

