

## **SSSRT COMMUNIQUE: MANDATED VACCINE QUESTIONS/ BC VACCINE CARD INFORMATION**

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### **PHO RESPONSE TO REQUESTS TO THE PHO TO EXTEND THE MANDATORY VACCINE ORDER TO THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR**

Thank you for your ongoing efforts during this time of uncertainty to keep people safe. We continue to hear from a variety of stakeholders who are requesting that the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) implement a mandate requiring vaccinations for front line staff of community social services sector. We have been discussing this with the PHO's team and want to provide you with an update.

#### **COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective both at preventing illness and particularly at preventing serious outcomes of COVID-19**

Completing a series of COVID-19 vaccines is the most effective way to decrease one's personal risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19. The good news is that as of Sept. 13, 2021 over 85% of eligible people in British Columbia have received their first COVID-19 vaccine and more than 78% have completed two doses.

These high rates of vaccination have dramatically decreased serious outcomes in fully vaccinated individuals. The current increases in COVID-19 in the province are driven by pockets of unvaccinated people; and the overwhelming majority of people admitted to the ICU for COVID-19 are unvaccinated.

#### **Concerns about COVID-19 exposure risk from unvaccinated individuals**

We know some people in the social services sector are concerned about potential exposure risk due to support workers or staff who may not be fully vaccinated. We also know that a very small number of people who can't be vaccinated for medical reasons.

COVID-19 is now an endemic virus which means it will continue to be in our communities, much like the influenza virus. The most effective way to decrease your personal risk of serious outcomes from COVID-19 is to be fully vaccinated, so we continue to encourage everyone to complete their full series.

## **Why are vaccines mandatory for staff in long-term care (LTC) facilities and other health care workers, but not for staff in social services sector?**

The PHO has issued a public health order that requires mandatory vaccination for staff working in long term care and assisted living and health authority operated healthcare facilities (i.e., hospitals). Ordering mandatory vaccination for staff is a measure of last resort and requires evidence of significant health risk that justifies potentially impacting an individual's employment. The very frail elderly in congregate settings, such as LTC and assisted living, continues to be the group at highest risk for serious COVID-19 outcomes. There have also been COVID-19 outbreaks in other healthcare facilities, which can jeopardize the healthcare systems' ability to provide care. It is important for everybody in these settings to be protected to reduce the risk for residents and patients who may not develop strong immune responses themselves, and also to preserve function of critical parts of healthcare system such as hospitals.

The risk of COVID-19 in community settings has decreased significantly as vaccination rates have climbed. While there has been an increase in COVID-19 cases, fully vaccinated individuals who get COVID-19 tend to have mild illness. The greatest risk for serious outcomes at this point in B.C.'s pandemic is amongst unvaccinated individuals.

Mandatory vaccinations for staff are a measure of last resort and are reserved for situations where there is a significant, broad public risk for serious outcomes of COVID-19 or a serious risk to the function of the healthcare system.

### **Ongoing monitoring of the need for an order for the social services sector**

The PHO is continuing to monitor areas of risk to determine if further vaccine orders will be needed for other sectors, including the social services sector.

At this time, the rationale compelling a last resort measure such as a vaccine order for staff in social sector settings has not yet reached the ethical standard that must be met. The PHO is actively monitoring the epidemiology and if there are significant changes will consider further measures as necessary.

The PHO recognizes that some staff in these settings (i.e., licensed healthcare providers who are employed by a Health Authority), may be subject to the new mandatory vaccine for healthcare workers order that was announced Sept. 13, 2021. The specific details of this order are not available at this time and will be available once the written order is posted on the [PHO website](#) in the days to come.

## Remember the important steps you can take

The majority of social service sector providers and the people they serve have already received vaccinations and have strong protective responses to the vaccine. Please continue to provide information about the importance of vaccinations to sector staff and those you support so as many people as possible get their two shots.

Please continue to communicate the need for compliance with all the guidance and safety measures required by the PHO. These steps are helping ensure services are safe.

Some agencies have decided to request vaccination information of staff in order to comply with recent vaccine requirements limiting access to community venues such as gyms, movie theatres and restaurants, where a support worker may go as part of a community outing. [CSSEA has provided some guidance on helpful approaches to this matter on their web site here.](#)

## NEW BC VACCINE CARD INFORMATION

Here is some important information on the new BC Vaccine Card, a digital or printed document showing proof of vaccination.

The Province announced that effective Sept. 13, 2021, a new proof of vaccination will be required for people 12+ to access a variety of discretionary, non-essential businesses, and activities. This is a time-limited measure applicable to some events, services, and businesses only, but we know this is a significant change for the people you serve.

Please note that coffee shops, fast-food outlets and other unlicensed restaurants that do not offer table service do not require proof of vaccination. We know these are important places for many – including people with limited options for shelter during inclement weather – and these are much lower risk settings, compared to licensed and table service restaurants. For your convenience, a full list of places that require proof of vaccination and examples of those that do not is available at [gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard](http://gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard).

As this is a new process, the people you serve may turn to you for help in obtaining their BC Vaccine Cards. The best source for information about the process, is to visit the website, available in multiple languages at [gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard](http://gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard).

Most people will get their card online by entering their name, date of birth, Personal Health Number (PHN), and date of their first or second dose. People who have smartphones can save it to their device (for example by taking a screenshot), or they can print a paper copy.

For individuals who do not have access to a smartphone or a computer, there are a few different ways to get a paper card, including:

- Asking a trusted organization, family member, or friend to print out the Vaccine Card on their behalf
- Calling the provincial Get Vaccinated call centre at 1-833-838-2323 available from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., daily to get a copy of their Vaccine Card mailed to them
  - Translation support is available in 140 languages
  - Telephone services for the Deaf are available at 7-1-1
  - Video Relay Services also provide sign language interpretation at no cost for registered deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired people

The use of the BC Vaccine Card will be phased in to allow people extra time to transition to their new cards. From Sept. 13-26, 2021, people will also be able to use the vaccination records they received at B.C. vaccine clinics or pharmacies as valid proof of vaccination. Starting Sept. 27, 2021, only the BC Vaccine Card will be accepted for people vaccinated in B.C.

People 19+ will also be required to show government-issued photo ID along with their proof of vaccination. Young people aged 12 to 18 do not need to show ID. If a person receiving provincial income assistance or disability assistance does not have government-issued photo ID, they can request an Identification Supplement to cover the cost of obtaining ID for a person in their family unit by calling the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction at 1-866-866-0800.

Many people who don't have PHNs were issued temporary PHNs when they were immunized – even if they do not have MSP coverage – to ensure their record of vaccination was captured in the provincial immunization registry. If anyone has lost or forgotten their PHN they can contact the Get Vaccinated call centre to obtain their PHN at 1-833-838-2323, available 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., daily. Everyone's information will be kept private and will never be shared with other agencies or parts of government.

Medical reasons that someone cannot receive a COVID-19 vaccine are limited to very few individuals. There will be an exemption process for those extremely rare circumstances, involving a person's doctor and the Office of the PHO. These instances will be extremely rare. As the risk of acquiring COVID-19 for people who are clinically vulnerable and who are not yet vaccinated has become dramatically higher in the past weeks, now more than ever it is key that people receive vaccines to protect themselves and to reduce the risk of transmission in their community.