

**COVID-19
Situation Update
University of British Columbia
July 17, 2020**

UBC

UBC – Okanagan

- Updates are provided at: <https://ok.ubc.ca/covid19/>

UBC – Vancouver

Information provided by government/healthcare agencies/research agencies

- On July 15, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training announced that applications for StudentAid BC, along with the new non-repayable B.C. Access Grant, are now open. Every student who applies for StudentAid BC will be automatically assessed for the new B.C. Access Grant, which should fund over 40,000 low- and middle-income students. These students will receive up to \$4,000 a year. The Ministry also announced new investments of \$2.175 million to support post-secondary students and faculty. The funding includes \$1.5 million to be shared by 20 public post-secondary institutions to develop or build upon supports for students with cognitive, mental health or physical disabilities. Government is also providing \$275,000 to BCcampus to develop online resources and tools for students, staff and faculty to support well-being. Resources include a website, videos and webinars on topics such as adapting to online learning, building resilience, stress management and understanding financial supports. BCcampus began running the webinars in April 2020. They will run regularly into 2021, with dedicated sessions planned for students, faculty and staff. Sessions are recorded, transcribed and hosted on the BCcampus website. Also this fall, students and faculty at public post-secondary institutions throughout B.C. will have access to new OER being created and adapted. Over 310 textbooks, supplementary manuals and guides are available through B.C.'s Open Textbook collection. The Province is investing \$400,000 through BCcampus to create fully developed OER courses and support services for a range of courses.
- On July 14, Marco Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, announced additional measures to support international students beginning a new program online this fall, if their institution is offering the program online. The changes will give students more certainty about their ability to enter Canada once travel and health restrictions are eased in Canada and their home countries. Students will be eligible to work in Canada after graduation, even if they need to begin their studies online from overseas. The new measures include:
 - providing priority study-permit processing for students who have submitted a complete application online, to ensure that permits are processed as quickly as possible
 - allowing students to count the time spent pursuing their studies online abroad toward their eligibility for a post-graduation work permit, if they have submitted a study permit application and if at least 50% of their program is completed in Canada
 - providing reassurances to international students who cannot submit all of the documentation needed to complete processing of their applications, and who choose to pursue programs through distance learning, by implementing a temporary 2-stage approval process

- The temporary process will allow applicants to count the time spent studying online abroad towards their post-graduation work permit once they receive an approval-in-principle, as long as they are able to satisfy all requirements and receive the full approval of their study permit application at a later date. As services begin to reopen, applicants will be required to submit remaining documents and receive an approved study permit before being allowed to travel to Canada.
- This process is available to students starting a program in the fall semester who submit a study permit application before September 15, 2020. This measure will reassure students that they can enrol and begin their studies this fall online, even when they are not able to submit all required documentation due to pandemic-related closures.
- It is important for prospective students to note that commencing their studies online from abroad following approval-in-principle of a study permit application is not a guarantee that they will receive a full approval of their study permit application, or be authorized to pursue their studies in Canada. It is still possible that an applicant could receive a negative final decision on their study permit based on factors such as inadmissibility for criminality or security reasons, and the inability to predict how the COVID-19 situation and any associated travel restrictions will evolve.
- On July 13, the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau announced that the federal government is extending its program to subsidize wages until December.
- On July 14, the BC Government announced changes to the Workers Compensation Act. The proposed changes focus on improving supports for injured workers, while advancing worker safety. The changes include:
 - raising the maximum annual salary amount on which workers' compensation benefits are based;
 - authorizing WorkSafeBC to provide preventive medical treatment before a claim is accepted;
 - giving powers to the court to issue WorkSafeBC search and seizure warrants that are appropriate for investigating workplace safety infractions; and
 - giving people a voice in serious workplace prosecutions and trials by using victim impact statements.
- This legislation will fast-track the effective date of presumptions if established by WorkSafeBC's board of directors for occupational diseases caused by viral pathogens. The presumption would simplify the process for workers who make a workers' compensation claim if they contract viruses on the job. This would ensure that people who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 at work are able to access benefits more quickly.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, WorkSafeBC is allowing businesses to defer paying their premiums for six months without penalty or interest. As well, WorkSafeBC is waiving premiums on wages paid to workers of employers receiving the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy for the duration of the program.
- On July 16, Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, announced that the government has laid out the details of a repayment framework to be put in place later this summer, helping renters and landlords to transition and tenants in arrears to maintain their housing when the ban on evictions for non-payment of rent is lifted ahead of Sept. 1, 2020. The plan requires landlords to give tenants until July 2021 to repay any outstanding rent, as long as monthly instalments are paid. Renters will not have to make their first payment until the first rent due date following 30 days of notice from the date of the repayment plan. This will be Oct.

1 for most renters, assuming their landlord provides them with a repayment plan before the end of August.

- Two other emergency measures related to rentals will be extended. In the early stages of the pandemic, landlords were temporarily prohibited from charging rent increases. These rent increases will continue to be restricted until December 2020. In addition, to protect the health of building residents, landlords will continue to have the ability to restrict access to common spaces when required for COVID-19 related health reasons.
- On July 16, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that non-essential travel between Canada and the US remains restricted. The current border measures are extended by another 30 days - until August 21st.
- On July 16, the First Ministers issued a statement: “First Ministers agreed to an FPT Safe Restart Agreement, supported by over \$19 billion in federal investments, to help provinces and territories restart the economy over the next six to eight months while making Canada more resilient to possible future waves of the virus. Funding under the Safe Restart Agreement will help provinces and territories, who have had to respond to COVID-19 in unique ways and have already made major investments and will continue to do so, in critical areas, such as healthcare, childcare and municipal services. First Ministers recognize that the territories and smaller jurisdictions face distinct challenges and circumstances, which will need to be addressed separately. Funding includes support for expanding testing and contact tracing capabilities so that provincial and territorial health authorities are able to mitigate outbreaks of COVID-19. This funding will also support capacity in health care services; procurement of personal protective equipment; and support for Canadians facing mental health challenges, including problematic substance abuse. First Ministers also agree to jointly provide support to municipalities to maintain the delivery of critical services. There is also a dedicated stream of funding for public transit for jurisdictions with additional investment needs in this area. Funding will also support measures to protect vulnerable populations, including seniors in long-term care facilities, and child care services, so parents can return to work. Under the agreement, the Government of Canada will establish a temporary income support program to provide workers with up to ten days of paid sick leave related to COVID-19. Provinces and territories will establish job protected sick leave legislation or regulation in their respective jurisdictions.”

BC and Canadian update

- On July 15, the Minister of Health and the Provincial Health Officer expressed concern about the recent increase in new cases as COVID-19 silently circulates in communities. Early on, many of B.C.’s long-term care and assisted living facilities were impacted, most of the new cases are in the broader community.
- On July 15, Danuta Skowronski, Epidemiology Lead of Influenza & Emerging Respiratory Pathogens at BCCDC and Clinical Professor in the UBC School of Population & Public Health *et al.* published a paper with estimates of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) sero-prevalence (the overall occurrence of a disease within a population at one time, as measured by blood tests) for two periods: the start (March) and end (May) of first-wave mitigation measures in BC. They sampled anonymized sera obtained from an outpatient laboratory network, including children and adults in the Greater Vancouver Area. The May sero-prevalence estimate was extrapolated to the source population to assess surveillance under-ascertainment (the ratio of estimated infections versus reported cases). In March, 2 of 869 specimens were positive, with age-standardized sero-prevalence of 0.28%. Neither specimen had detectable antibodies. In May, 4 of 885 specimens were positive, with age-standardized sero-prevalence of 0.55%. All 4 specimens had detectable antibodies. They estimate ~8 times more infections than reported

cases and concluded that less than 1% of British Columbians had been infected with SARS-CoV-2 when first-wave mitigation measures were relaxed in May 2020. The findings indicate successful suppression of community transmission in BC, but also substantial residual susceptibility. See: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.13.20153148v1.full.pdf>

- Yesterday (July 16), the Provincial Health Officer reported that we have had a total of 3,170 cases in B.C. (142 new cases since July 9)
 - There are 192 active cases of COVID-19 in the province (17 more than on July 9) and 2,789 people who tested positive have recovered.
 - 27 cases have been linked to exposures at private parties in Kelowna between late June and early July. Eighteen of those cases are residents of the Interior, and nine are from the Lower Mainland. Interior Health has released a list of dates and places where people may have been exposed: <https://news.interiorhealth.ca/covid-19/>
 - Of the total COVID-19 cases, 15 people are hospitalized (3 more than on July 9), 3 of whom are in intensive care (1 less than on July 9). The remaining people are recovering at home in self-isolation.
 - There have been 189 deaths in British Columbia (3 since July 9)
 - 2 long-term care or assisted-living facilities continue to have active outbreaks (same as on July 9), 1 acute care facility has an active outbreak (same as on July 9), and there is one active community outbreak (one more than on July 9). There have been several community exposure events that have required alerts to be issued.
 - The Provincial Health Officer referred to the Skowronski et al. study described above: “A number of scientists from the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and University of British Columbia, with support from LifeLabs and Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, released a study outlining the results of initial serology testing within our province. This was the first report of its kind released in Canada. The study has some important lessons for all of us that can guide our actions and decision-making in the weeks ahead.... There is still community transmission as evidenced by the rate of infections in the samples. The study also shows us that our province does not have sufficient immunity to prevent a second wave. That is why continuing with the measures we have in place is vital to keeping us all safe. Using our layers of protection and following our foundational rules for safe social interactions is our path forward.”
 - Assisted living, long-term care homes and seniors’ rental buildings with ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks are as follows:
 - Vancouver Coastal Health:
 - Holy Family Hospital long-term care facility
 - Fraser Health:
 - Maple Hill long-term care facility
 - Last night, an outbreak was declared in the neonatal intensive care unit at St. Paul's Hospital.
 - BCCDC identified WestJet flights with passengers carrying COVID-19 on, including flight 460 from Kelowna to Calgary on July 2, flight 186 from YVR to Edmonton on July 5 and flight 3312 from Kelowna to Edmonton on July 5. A case of the virus was also identified on Korean Air 071 from Incheon to Vancouver on July 5.
- In Canada, July 16, 2020, 7:00 p.m. EDT (cases on July 9, 2020):
 - Number of people tested: 3,387,755 (3,098,193)
 - Total cases: 109,264 (106,805)

- Recovered: 72,836 (70,574)
- Deaths: 8,827 (8,749)
- The majority of cases (86.2%) and deaths (95.0%) have been reported by Ontario and Quebec.
- No new cases have been reported in 7 provinces or territories within the past 24 hours (as of yesterday).
- No new deaths have been reported in 10 provinces or territories within the past 24 hours (as of yesterday).
- Over 3,387,755 people have been tested for COVID-19 in Canada. This corresponds to a test rate of 90,126 per 1 million people. Of all people tested, 3.0% have been found to be positive.
- Of the COVID-19 cases reported in Canada to date, approximately one half (55.8%) are female. Approximately one-third (34.0%) of cases are 60 years old and over
- The probable exposure settings of reported cases with available data are:
 - domestic acquisition (defined as any exposure that occurred within Canada): 96,352 (90.4%)
 - from contact with a COVID case: 55.0%
 - from contact with a traveller: 0.8%
 - from an unknown source: 34.6%
 - currently unknown (information pending): 5,747 (5.4%)
 - travelled outside of Canada: 4,496 (4.2%)
- Within First Nations communities in provinces, as of July 16, according to Indigenous Services Canada:
 - 352 confirmed positive cases of COVID-19
 - 30 hospitalizations
 - 314 recovered cases
 - There is a total of 17 confirmed positive cases in Nunavik, Quebec, and all have recovered.

USA update as of July 16, 2020 (as of July 9, 2020)

- Total cases: 3,483,832 (3,047,671 on July 9)
- Total deaths: 136,938 (132,056 on July 9)

International update

- On July 12, 230,000 cases of COVID-19 were reported to WHO. Almost 80% of those cases were reported from just 10 countries, and 50% come from just two countries.
- There are roughly four situations at the moment:
 - The first is countries that were alert – they responded rapidly and effectively to the first cases. They have avoided large outbreaks. Several countries in the Mekong region, the Pacific, the Caribbean and Africa fit into this category.
 - The second is countries in which there was a major outbreak that was brought under control through a combination of leadership and populations adhering to public health measures. Many countries in Europe and elsewhere have demonstrated that it is possible to bring large outbreaks under control.

- The third is countries that overcame the first peak of the outbreak, eased restrictions, and are now struggling with new peaks and accelerating cases.
- The fourth is countries that are in the intense transmission phase of their outbreak; this is seen in the Americas, South Asia, and several countries in Africa.
- The epicentre remains in the Americas, where more than 50% of the world's cases have been recorded.
- Situation in numbers (by WHO Region) (July 16, 2020)
 - Globally: 13,378,853 cases (11,874,226 cases reported on July 9)
 - Deaths: 580,045 (545,481 deaths reported on July 9)
 - Americas: 7,016,851 cases (6,125,802 cases reported on July 9)
 - Deaths 294,301 (272,606 deaths reported on July 9)

Selected research findings/actions

- The identification of a new pathogen, such as SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is accompanied by many unknowns. Six months into the pandemic, there are certain characteristics of the virus and the disease it causes that remain unclear, particularly its ability to spread in the human population and its virulence. To enhance understanding of the characteristics of the COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) virus and the disease it causes, WHO has developed a series of early epidemiological protocols, the WHO Unity studies. These protocols enable analysis of the local context, as well as comparison across different settings. See: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/early-investigations>
- In the journal *Science*, Kai Kupferschmidt published an article about the genetic mutation of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. He noted that at some time early in the pandemic, one of the 30,000 letters in the genome of SARS-CoV-2 changed from an A to a G. Today, that mutation has spread globally around the world. The virus's potential to evolve in a nastier direction or to become more benign is unknown because it is changing more slowly than most other viruses, giving virologists fewer mutations to study. Some virologists have suggested that this is occurring because the SARS-CoV-2 was already well adapted to humans when it was first noted in December 2019; that is, it had already developed its ability to infect people. On average, the coronavirus accumulates about two changes per month in its genome. Most of the changes don't seem to influence how the virus behaves, but a few may change the disease's transmissibility or severity. See: Kupferschmidt, K. (2020, July 14). The pandemic virus is slowly mutating. But is it getting more dangerous? *Science*, doi:10.1126/science.abd8226

Reliable Sources of Information

1. World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/>
 - Q&A on coronaviruses - <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>
2. British Columbia Centre for Disease Control - <http://www.bccdc.ca/about/news-stories/stories/2020/information-on-novel-coronavirus>
3. Vancouver Coastal Health - <http://www.vch.ca/about-us/news/vancouver-coastal-health-statement-on-coronavirus>
4. Public Health Agency of Canada (Government of Canada) –
 - FAQ's - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/frequently-asked-questions.html>

- Outbreak Update - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>