



## **October 15, 2020, CLBC Teleconference for Individuals and Families Plain Language Summary**

### **Who were the speakers on this call?**

- Dr. Daniele Behn Smith, Deputy Provincial Health Officer
- Michael Prince, Community Living BC Board Chair
- Ross Chilton, Community Living BC CEO

### **Opening message from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- BC public health staff are focusing on information that shows what is happening in B.C. The most useful number to look at is people in hospital or critical care for COVID-19. Right now, this number is lower than in April 2020. This number is stable.
- School has been open for 4 weeks. There have been some COVID cases in schools. But this has not led to more cases in the community.
- For students, the number of tests being done has gone up during the last month. It is more than double from the beginning of the school year. The number of positive tests for students is staying low.
- Right now it takes 24 to 48 hours to get test results back after someone takes a COVID-19 test. The number of COVID-19 cases is stabilizing in B.C.

### **Opening message from Ross Chilton:**

- Thank you to everyone who sent questions. Questions help CLBC understand the challenges people and families are facing.

### **Opening message from Michael J Prince:**

- We are planning next month's call for Tuesday, November 17, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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***Question: Our daughter's service provider sends us emails regarding staff or individuals' health status. For example, if a participant or staff member has the sniffles or a headache, they are asked to not go to the program. The result: there have been days when there was not enough staff, so the service provider asked some participants to stay home. This seems to happen a lot, and flu season is still on the way.***

***Should we expect this to happen all through the winter?***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- Public health staff know about this issue. We are now living with COVID-19 until there is a vaccine. This means we have to change the way we do things. We are trying to do our regular activities in a safe way.
- The goals of B.C.'s public health team are:
  - Protect people who are vulnerable to COVID-19
  - Protect the healthcare system
  - Balance the effects of healthcare measures on people and society
- Important information about COVID-19 testing right now in B.C.:
  - The number of COVID tests that are positive is about 1% to 2%.
  - So, 98% to 99% of people who take COVID tests do not have COVID. They have some other reason for feeling sick.
  - Last week there were over 68,000 COVID tests.
  - Public health staff are working on making it faster for people to get a COVID-19 test.
- There is still a risk of COVID in the community. People who are feeling sick should stay away from others.
- But, if someone's COVID test is negative, and they are feeling better, they can return to normal activities.

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- It is good to hear Service Providers are talking to families regularly. It is important for families to get information.
- It is important for Service Providers to follow health guidance, but they do not have to take extra measures. The health guidance helps keep people safe.
- If a staff person came to work and had COVID, it could spread to people they support and also other staff. Then those staff would also not be able to work.
- We understand it can cause frustration, but it is important for people who are feeling sick to stay home. It helps limit the spread of COVID-19.

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**Question: *When a vaccine is available, will people with developmental disabilities be prioritized? (So that they can fully participate in activities, and family caregivers can return to their normal lives as well.)***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- There is a lot of work happening around the world to find a vaccine. However, there is no vaccine yet.
- B.C. is doing a lot of work to address this question. Government is figuring out who will get a vaccine first when it is available.
- There will be a high demand when the vaccine becomes available, so supply will be limited.
- B.C. uses the "[COVID-19 Ethical Decision-Making Framework](#)" to help make decisions about this. Decisions will focus on protecting people who are most vulnerable.
- We will share updates about vaccines in the future when there is more information.

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**Question: *Families are very concerned about the risk of COVID-19 infection in schools.***

***What precautions should families take if there are people in their home with disabilities or health conditions that put them at higher risk?***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- There has been a lot of work to prepare for reopening schools. The number of cases in schools remains low and stable.
- School Districts have different learning options for students and families that have higher risk with getting COVID-19. People should talk to their local school district about this.
- Being back in school is good for kids. It hasn't led to a big increase in COVID-19 cases.

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**Question: *I asked our service provider if my daughter could come home to join my sister and I (we're all in her bubble) for our Sunday Thanksgiving dinner. I was denied because there were 2 sisters, not just 1. The rule was: only 1 allowed. I don't understand this decision. Staff go to their homes with unknown numbers of people and return to serve our children.***

***What is the health and safety difference between these two situations?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- Family gatherings are important to people.
  - Service providers are working to keep people safe and help them stay connected. They are trying to find a balance between these two things.
  - Each situation is different. It's important for families have conversations about this with their service provider.
  - Sometimes there is a disagreement. Service providers have "dispute resolution processes" that could be used to help resolve disagreements.
  - Service providers and family members both want the same thing: to keep everyone safe during this pandemic.
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**Question: *I'm a self advocate and I need mental health support that will work for me.***

***Will there be something available for people with diverse abilities?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- The number of counsellors who have experience working with people with diverse abilities is limited. This has been a challenge for many years.
  - I suggest finding someone in your life who you trust, and who understands the way you communicate. It could be a friend, family member or support worker.
  - This person could help you access counselling together. They would keep everything private. This would be similar to going to see a doctor with someone who is close to you.
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**Question: *Some parents of adults with complex needs living in group homes are very concerned that support workers are also working evening jobs, maybe at gas stations or pubs. Some parents who are elderly are thinking about bringing their loved ones home to care for them.***

***Why won't the government put a single-site requirement in place for support workers?***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- A single-site requirement could cause problems. It could limit the number of available support workers.
- We talked to many long-term senior care facilities about this. They were worried a single-site requirement would cause a shortage of support workers. This would mean they couldn't provide services.

- Now, we have new tools to limit the spread of COVID-19, including:
  - More testing
  - Timely and effective contact tracing
- We use public health orders that are least disruptive, but still keep people safe. It is a balance between these two factors.
- For example: During the summer, many COVID-19 cases happened at restaurants and bars later in the evening. That’s why the public health order was updated to stop alcohol sales at 10 p.m.
- Public health orders are updated when data shows that it is needed.

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- We understand this is a challenge for many parents.
- We have had conversations with service providers. Many of them already have staff working at only one site.
- Another part of this is the idea of “single-employer.” It would be best if all service provider staff just had one job. However, many people have more than one job. Employers can’t tell their employees to have only one job.
- Unfortunately, risk cannot be totally eliminated. However, most support workers know that what they do in other jobs or their personal life could impact the people they support. They are limiting the number of people they meet.

***Question: At the best of times, my son has difficulty making friends. At least before COVID-19, he could get out in the community and be around people. He’s now very lonely and is not good with using online tools like Zoom. We have individualized funding (IF) and are creating supports ourselves.***

***Is there a group of parents using IF that get together to share ideas about relationships during COVID? If not, could CLBC help create one?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- We know loneliness can be a challenge for people with disabilities. It can also be painful for their parents to see. Self advocates often tell me that friendships are one of their top priorities.
- Family Support Institute (FSI) and Vela are doing some great work on this. They are creating opportunities for families to connect and support each other.
- You can contact them to learn more:
  - [familysupportbc.com](http://familysupportbc.com)
  - [www.velacanada.org](http://www.velacanada.org)

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- These are certainly challenging times. As Dr. Bonnie Henry has said, “We’re all in the same storm, but we’re not all in the same boat.”
  - It has been a privilege to connect with CLBC, and the self advocates and families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This community is very strong at finding innovative ideas and ways to support each other.
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***Question: We are struggling with my daughter being home all the time. I really need to hire support or respite staff to help get through this. However, it feels impossible to find anyone and we are competing with service providers who can offer higher wages and benefits.***

***Is there anything being done to support families struggling to find staff?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- We were looking at this problem even before COVID started.
  - Last year, we got some funding to help improve Family Support Institute and Vela’s “Support Worker Central” website.
  - This website is for families looking for support workers. Also, people who want to be support workers can post their availability on the site. It’s a matching service between support workers and families. Many people are using the site these days.
  - I have seen families use Facebook to connect with other families to share a support worker. Sometimes it works for 2 or 3 families to come together to hire one support worker.
  - Not everyone wants to work for an agency. Working directly with a family can have its own benefits, like flexibility.
  - I know of a family who had a card with the contact information. They would give it to anyone they met who they thought could be a good support worker.
  - Many people working in hospitality and tourism do not have jobs right now because of COVID-19. They might not have thought about working in the community living field. But they could be perfect for this work.
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***Question: What is being done to reach out to families at home, especially those who are not connected to a service provider, or don’t have a strong relationship with their agency?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- We are looking at ways we can reach these families and help them.

- CLBC recently did a “Resilience Survey” to get feedback from family caregivers. It helped us understand how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting families. It also helped us understand what CLBC and service providers can do to help these families.
  - Family Support Institute provides family-to-family support. Talking to another family that understands your situation is a valuable resource.
  - If you need help, and don’t have a relationship with your service provider, please contact your local CLBC office. ([Find all CLBC office contact information here](#)).
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**Question: *What is the best way to get the flu shot for my son who is not able to follow COVID-19 public health protocols? (for example: we can’t wait in line at a drug store).***

***Are there other options people who are high-risk and keeping their bubble very small?***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- B.C. is preparing to increase the number of people getting the flu vaccine this year. We have about 30% more vaccine on order.
  - This vaccine gives some protection against the influenza virus, but not COVID-19.
  - The way people get the vaccine will follow COVID-19 safety protocols.
  - Pharmacists, family doctor offices, and local health units will be doing some vaccinations by appointment. For people who can’t wait in line, I recommend making an appointment with one of those places.
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**Question: *Should I and my son or daughter get both the flu shot and pneumonia shot to help cover more COVID risks?***

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) website has information about the recommendations and eligibility for both of these shots. ([Visit the BCCDC website here](#). The list of vaccines is on the right side of the page. Information about the pneumonia vaccine is under “Pneumococcal”).
  - The flu shot will be free for most people in B.C.
  - The BCCDC website shows who can receive the pneumonia shot for free.
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**Question: *My son is worried about voting in the upcoming provincial election.***

***Is there help available for him to vote? Who can I ask?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- Voting is an important part of participating in your community. It's important that people with diverse abilities can vote.
  - The deadline to mail in your vote has passed. However, Elections BC works hard to make sure voting is accessible to everyone. For example: there is early voting ("advance polling") happening now.
  - [Read about all the ways Elections BC can help you vote here.](#)
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**Question: Physical distancing is a real issue anywhere, and it's not even winter yet.**

**Can CLBC partner with local recreation centres or municipalities about creating some safer, larger indoor spaces we could use for "safer community bubbles" during the winter months?**

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- Service providers have been thinking about the change in weather. They understand the end of summer means outdoor activities are more limited. They have been planning for this. You can connect with your agency and ask them what information they have about safe indoor activities.
- People can look around their own community to see what is available. Many recreation centres are starting to reopen. They are being very careful to keep people safe. Usually, you can reserve a specific time to go. You can find information online or call them.

**Answer from Dr. Behn Smith:**

- It's important to remember: "Fewer faces, bigger spaces."
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**Question: *I am a self advocate. I don't have access to technology and I live alone. I feel left out and by myself.***

***Can anyone help me get and use a computer?***

***Also, does CLBC or any service providers have technology loan programs (for borrowing computers or other devices)?***

**Answer from Ross Chilton:**

- Some people told us they have used the extra \$300 per month (from their PWD cheque) to buy technology to stay connected. For example: laptops that are easy to use.



- There are no loan programs right now. However, CLBC is paying attention to this issue.
  - It is great to see other people but it can also be valuable to just talk on the phone. You could set up a regular time to talk on the phone with someone you know well.
  - If you need help using technology, this is something your support worker could help you with. These are good skills to have during COVID, and after COVID.
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**The next teleconference for individuals and families is scheduled for November 17.**

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If you have an unanswered question, please email it to [CLBCInfo@gov.bc.ca](mailto:CLBCInfo@gov.bc.ca)

**Thank-you!**