

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Community Information Session, January 21, 2021

ISSUE DATE: January 28, 2021

This document is a compilation of the questions and answers provided at the COVID-19 community information session held on Zoom on January 21, 2021

A full recording of the session can be found at [www.whistler.ca/covid19](http://www.whistler.ca/covid19)

### Jump to:

Public Health & Testing Questions.....	1
Mask Questions .....	3
Vaccine Questions.....	4
Travel & Tourism Questions .....	5
Business & Local Impact Questions .....	10

### Public Health & Testing Questions

**1. Curious as to why we need to make an appointment for a test?**

*The testing trailer in Whistler shares doctors and resources with the Whistler Health Clinic. As the daily test demands can be high at times, the appointment system allows the doctors to spread out the appointments throughout the day, enabling them to provide a focused, holistic service to the patients who may require additional supports. The appointment system also eliminates the need to wait for testing at the testing site therefore eliminating line ups and gatherings of people. (<https://divisionsbc.ca/sea-sky>)*

**2. What is time between positive results received to being contacted by public health?**

*Currently, test results are usually returned within 24-48 hours.*

**3. What's the split in recent cases? Local vs. visitors?**

*Cases are mapped by location of residence despite where they are tested, therefore cases from out of Province are not included in reported numbers. The vast majority of cases are Whistler residents. (Latest case numbers are updated weekly at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/data#maps>)*

**4. How many active COVID cases are currently in Whistler?**

*As of January 21 2021, the BC CDC reported that the Howe Sound area had 14 new cases two weeks ago. Last week, there were 63 new cases within the House Sound area.*

*In 2020, Whistler had 271 cases, and in 2021, Whistler has had 103 so far, which aligns with the trend of 2020. Overall, Whistler has had less than 400 since beginning of pandemic.*

**5. Any connection to the holiday period which ended 2 to 3 weeks ago and the current surge in cases?**

*Yes, the recent increase of cases is related to social gatherings over the holidays.*

**6. What are we offering as a community for people who live in high density housing to self-isolate away from housemates?**

*Whistler Community Services Society and Vancouver Coastal Health have been providing support to the community, and to those in high density housing, throughout the pandemic.*

*Support from Whistler Community Services Society include isolation housing support, food bank delivery, hygiene kits and mental health and emotional support.*

*Anyone who is tested in Whistler is also provided information on how to access WCSS services.*

*If you need support, please call the WCSS office Monday to Saturday 9am-4:30pm at 604-932-0113 or leave a voicemail. Please expect a turnaround time of 24-48 hours for a food bank delivery, so please call promptly to connect if you are in need of food. Outreach appointments can be booked virtually for emotional and financial support by visiting [mywcss.org](http://mywcss.org).*

**7. Pre-COVID it was difficult to access a family/consistent doctor in Whistler. With COVID it feels like going to the doctor is adding to a pressured system - should we be worried?**

*While Whistler does have a shortage of General Practitioner doctors, we have a robust acute care group of physicians. This issue is not unique to Whistler. Providing routine care is equally important as providing COVID care. Doctors from the Whistler Medical Clinic strongly encourage everyone to seek medical care regardless if it is related to COVID-19. **Never push off seeing a doctor if you need it.** The Whistler Medical Clinic has set up a virtual walk-in clinic for anyone to seek care (for non-COVID related problems) if they don't have a GP. To make an appointment, visit [divisionsbc.ca/sea-sky/your-division/telehealth-appointments](http://divisionsbc.ca/sea-sky/your-division/telehealth-appointments)*

**8. When can we begin to go to our places of worship again?**

*As per the Provincial Health Order, religious in-person gatherings and worship services are suspended until February 5, 2021. This includes services at a church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara, temple, or other places of worship. However, religious services can continue using remote or virtual attendance options, like Zoom or Skype. If applicable, you can still visit your place of worship for individual activities such as contemplation or personal prayer.*

**9. Why isn't the Whistler clinic testing everyone? Even those that want to get tested for family reasons but have no symptoms.**

*If anyone is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, clinicians at the Whistler Medical Clinic are strongly encouraging to call the Whistler Medical Clinic for health advice. Upon calling, they will ask some screening questions and determine if it's appropriate for you to get testing. As per the BC Centre for Disease Control, testing of asymptomatic individuals is only recommended for use in public health investigations of a case, cluster or outbreak, and under the direction of a Medical Health Officer.*

**10.** For those who have had close contact with a COVID-19 case, and have even a single symptom included above, testing is recommended. For testing criteria, visit [visit.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/covid-19-testing/viral-testing](https://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/covid-19-testing/viral-testing)

**11. It seems there is some reluctance around testing in the Corridor. We hear the standard response to service staff who fear they have been exposed is to ask them to quarantine which does not alleviate their fear nor help them (or their business) economically. It also puts their colleagues at risk. We also hear that staff are coming up with work-arounds for testing, which is equally troublesome. Can you please clarify?**

*When someone has been told to quarantine for 2 weeks, if they develop symptoms they should get tested. If they test positive they will generally have to quarantine for 10 days from the day of their test. A negative test does not release someone from the need to self-isolate (due to the high rate of false negatives).*

**12. There are so many examples of kids “hanging out” after school and on weekends, going to each other’s houses and having unsafe social interactions. What additional messaging is planned for where school cohorts are allowed, and the family bubble?**

*The RMOW and its partners strongly encourage everyone to follow the Public Health Orders and recommendations of Dr. Bonnie Henry. This continued messaging encourages everyone to keep to our core bubbles, not engage in any indoor/outdoor social gatherings, and avoid having playdates.*

*For more information, view the [provide-wide restrictions](#).*

## Mask Questions

**13. Why are students not required to wear masks on the buses?**

*Middle and secondary students must wear a mask when riding the bus. Non-medical masks are not recommended for elementary students due to the increased likelihood they will touch their face and eyes, as well as require assistance to properly put on and take off their mask (requiring increased close personal contact from school staff).*

**14. Would you be able to clarify as to why elementary students don't have to wear masks?**

*All layers of protection (hierarchy of control) are incorporated into the safety plans for each school. While wearing a mask is one tool that helps prevent the spread of COVID-19, it is important that we ensure more effective infection prevention and exposure control measures are in place, such as learning cohorts, modified classroom spaces, staggered start times and health checks.*

*Non-medical masks are not recommended for elementary students due to the increased likelihood they will touch their face and eyes, as well as require assistance to properly put on and take off their mask (requiring increased close personal contact from school staff).*

*We also know that younger children do not transmit the virus in the same way as older students and adults. There is limited evidence of confirmed transmission within school settings. Most of the transmission is happening outside the school environment in*

households and the community. Kids are doing the best they can to follow the protocols on the school grounds.

The [SD48 Safety Plan for COVID-19 Exposure Control](#) is not a school district strategy, rather a public health recommendation. In addition, each school has developed a COVID-19 safety plan tailored to their local environment.

**15. Why are masks not mandated in the Whistler High Schools and on school grounds?**

All staff, middle and secondary students are required to wear a mask when they cannot safely distance themselves from others outside their Learning Group, including crowded common spaces like hallways and school busses. Students and staff have the option to wear a mask in the classroom when they are in the same Learning Group.

As the [hierarchy of controls](#) shows, there are many things we need to do to prevent the spread of COVID-19, none of them are perfect, though when used together there is less chance of transmission. Masking is only one of those things. Even if wearing masks, students and staff in different Learning Groups should seek to practice physical distancing, and to not crowd in large groups or gather together.

**16. Why has RMOW allowed people to work out on the cardio equipment at Meadow Park without masks when even during the 11:00 am to 12:15 vulnerable member's time? Can masks be mandatory at all times in the gym?**

Meadow Park Sports Centre is following all Public Health Orders regarding physical exercise and community centre operations. We have removed equipment from the facility to ensure prescribed distance between all cardio based equipment.

As per the Medical Health Officer, masks are required throughout the building with the exception of when being engaged in physical activity. This is also consistent with BC Recreation and Parks Association best practices, and ViaSport guidelines.

## Vaccine Questions

**17. When there is enough vaccine for the general population what will the plan/logistics be for vaccinating in Whistler?**

On Friday, January 22, the [BC Government announced its immunization plan](#) and timelines. Phase 1, which got underway in December 2020, starts by first immunizing those who are most vulnerable to severe illness and death, including long-term care residents and health-care workers, remote and at-risk Indigenous communities, and seniors.

Phase 2, starting in late February, expands immunizations to additional vulnerable populations, Indigenous communities and Elders, health-care staff and all seniors over the age of 80. Together, these two phases are focused on people who are most at risk.

As age is the single greatest risk factor for severe illness and death, Phase 3, starting in April, will expand to include people between the ages of 79 to 75 and work backwards in five-year increments to include those age 60 and over.

**18. Will you be recruiting volunteers to help with the vaccination clinics?**

Vancouver Coastal Health is looking for volunteers to help support the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in our community. Support is needed from March until the end of December

2021. Dates and times to be confirmed. Volunteer roles will include greeting clients, directing clients to lines, and helping with clinic flow.

If you are interested in volunteering in Whistler, please contact Caprii Doucet, Public Health Nurse, Vancouver Coastal Health at Caprii.Doucet@vch.ca. If you have any questions about the plan for COVID-19 vaccine roll out plans, please see VCH.ca's COVID-19 information page.

**19. Please explain how the vaccine works?**

The medicinal ingredient in both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is mRNA. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response without using the live virus that causes COVID-19. Once triggered, our body then makes antibodies. These antibodies help us fight the infection if the real virus does enter our body in the future.

When a person is given the vaccine, their cells will read the genetic instructions like a recipe and produce the spike protein. After the protein piece is made, the cell breaks down the instructions and gets rid of them.

The cell then displays the protein piece on its surface. Our immune system recognizes that the protein doesn't belong there and begins building an immune response and making antibodies.

Studies have found that the vaccine is 95 percent effective in preventing COVID-19. However, experts say we don't know yet if the vaccine will prevent transmission, which is why it's important to wear a mask and follow other public health guidelines after you're vaccinated.

**20. How do we know the vaccine is safe?**

Like all vaccines authorized for use in Canada, COVID-19 mRNA vaccines will be held to the same high safety, effectiveness and quality standards. Only mRNA vaccines that meet those standards receive approval.

Canada has approved the vaccine for use in people 16 and older as safety and effectiveness in kids has not yet been established.

**21. Will there be an ability for doctors to bump some people up in priority for immunization based on their vulnerability - so not age dependent - but only in cases where a doctor thinks they are at a higher risk and need to be done sooner?**

We expect that patients who are vulnerable will be prioritized but our local doctors have not yet received details about this.

**Travel & Tourism Questions**

**22. I'm wondering how many of Whistler's positive tests have been connected to people traveling into our public health region?**

All agencies in Whistler are encouraging everyone to follow the recommendations of our provincial health authorities, and right now their guidance is to avoid non-essential travel. However, it is important to note that 99% of COVID-19 transmission in Whistler to date has been local community transmission. Only 1% has been attributed to travel. (VCH)

*This tells us our focus should remain on our behaviours and COVID-19 safety protocols because that is how we will stop the spread of COVID-19 in our community.*

*The most important steps to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in Whistler include:*

- *Avoiding social gatherings outside our immediate households.*
- *Maintaining physical distance from those not in our household.*
- *Wearing a mask in public indoor places and on the Village Stroll.*
- *Staying home if you have been told to self-isolate or if you have any symptoms of illness.*
- *Follow all provincial health orders and recommendations.*

**23. Can we limit access on Highway 99 to only permit residents for a 14-day incubation period?**

*Limiting access on Highway 99 is not a practical solution due to the amount of travel back and forth for essential reasons. Establishing a roadblock isn't an initiative that the provincial government is considering at this time.*

*In B.C., there is a travel advisory in effect with the recommendation to avoid all non-essential travel. Whistler continues to encourage everyone to follow the recommendations of their provincial health authorities. This is not the time to come to Whistler for a vacation.*

**24. Why are out of province visitors who live in separate households not being asked to book separate hotel rooms while they stay in Whistler?**

*All agencies in Whistler are advising visitors of the COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines in British Columbia, which at this time, includes limiting social interactions to immediate households. Hotels and businesses only have the ability to share information and educate customers. If COVID-19 provincial health orders are not being followed – for example, group gatherings or not wearing masks in indoor settings – they can be reported to the RCMP who has the authority to issue fines for non-compliance.*

**25. If the virus is on the increase here in Whistler can you explain the rationale for continuing to allow visitors from the Lower Mainland and other provinces?**

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- *Staying home if you have been told to self-isolate or if you have any symptoms of illness.*
- *Follow all provincial health orders and recommendations.*

All agencies in Whistler are encouraging everyone to follow the recommendations of our provincial health authorities to avoid non-essential travel.

**26. Will our Elected Officials be speaking out publicly similar to other BC resorts where they have condemned visitors coming to the resort?**

Whistler continues to encourage everyone to follow the recommendations of their provincial health authorities. This is not the time to come to Whistler for a vacation.

The most important steps to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in Whistler include:

- Avoiding social gatherings outside our immediate households.
- Maintaining physical distance from those not in our household.
- Wearing a mask in public indoor places and on the Village Stroll.
- Staying home if you have been told to self-isolate or if you have any symptoms of illness.
- Follow all provincial health orders and recommendations.

**27. Why are we still promoting ‘visitors’ to Whistler? There are a lot of out of town sightseers on the mountain daily. Why is WB not supporting the non-essential travel advisory?**

In November 2020, Tourism Whistler paused all short-term advertising so as not to encourage any non-essential travel to Whistler while the Province’s travel advisory is in place. At this time, there is some forward-looking advertising in market promoting spring and summer, though they are sharing information on the current provincial health orders and recommendations on their website.

**28. The Atlantic Provinces enforce a 14 day Quarantine, why is this not the case in BC?**

Premier Horgan [released a statement](#) on January 21, 2021 regarding potential restrictions on interprovincial travel.

He stated that “the review of our legal options made it clear we can’t prevent people from travelling to British Columbia. We can impose restrictions on people travelling for non-essential purposes if they are causing harm to the health and safety of British Columbians. Much of current interprovincial travel is work related and therefore cannot be restricted. Public health officials tell us what is most important is for everyone to obey health orders, wherever they are, rather than imposing mobility rules. Therefore, we will not be imposing travel restrictions at this time. If we see transmission increase due to interprovincial travel, we will impose stronger restrictions on non-essential travellers. We will continue to work with the tourism and hospitality sectors to make sure all possible safety precautions are in place”.

He re-iterated that now is not the time for non-essential travel, “We ask all British Columbians to stay close to home while vaccines become available. And to all Canadians outside of B.C., we look forward to your visit to our beautiful province when we can welcome you safely”.

**29. Why are hotels taking reservations for non-essential travel to Whistler from other parts of BC and out of province travellers?**

All agencies in Whistler are encouraging everyone to follow the recommendations of our provincial health authorities to avoid non-essential travel.

*As the advisory is a recommendation and not an official order, we are not in a position to screen or enforce who is travelling for essential or non-essential reasons.*

*Instead, Whistler's focus is on ensuring exemplary COVID-19 safety protocols are in place and followed, which is what will help us stop the spread in our community.*

**30. Why are we still running tourism ads for Whistler? Does this not contravene the Public Health Orders?**

*In November 2020, Tourism Whistler paused all short-term advertising so as not to encourage any non-essential travel to Whistler while the province's travel advisory is in place. At this time, there is some forward-looking advertising in market promoting the spring and summer, though they are sharing information on the current provincial health orders and recommendations on their website.*

*The Resort Municipality of Whistler continues to share the provincial health orders and recommendations and is asking everyone to pause and refocus their efforts towards stopping the spread of this virus. Now is not the time to come to Whistler for a vacation.*

**31. What is the plan to help stop people from out of town coming here for vacation and spreading COVID-19. So many are not following our safety procedures when they come or respecting our small town.**

*The Resort Municipality of Whistler, Whistler Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Whistler have been working closely with local businesses since last spring to ensure adequate COVID-19 safety measures such as capacity limits, mask-wearing and physical distancing are in place to ensure the safety of all customers and our community.*

*All of the RMOW's community COVID-19 information is updated regularly at [Whistler.ca/Covid19](https://whistler.ca/covid19). Whistler continues to encourage everyone to follow the recommendations of their provincial health authorities. In B.C., there is a recommendation to avoid all non-essential travel. This is not the time to come to Whistler for a vacation.*

**32. Why does the federal government allow international travelers arriving in Canada to take one or more domestic connecting flights before going into quarantine?**

*Everyone entering Canada must follow mandatory isolation or quarantine requirements. As of January 7, 2021, air travellers are also required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result prior to boarding international flights to Canada.*

*Travellers are allowed to go directly to their final destination, unless there are provincial or territorial restrictions which require isolation at a designated location first. All passengers are required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering and practice physical distancing at all times.*

*Right now there is a ban on non-essential travel to Canada from other countries. There's also a rolling border closures with the United States which has been extended again until February 21, and will likely be extended after that.*

*Visit [travel.gc.ca](https://travel.gc.ca) for federal information on travel, quarantine and borders.*

**33. What are the stats behind visitors to Whistler in the holiday season? What is expected for Family Day and March break?**

*When the current order was issued back in November 2020, hotel occupancy dropped to about 10%. For the month of December it got up to 27%, which is based on a number of reservations made months in advance of that. Out of town guests were at a minimum as the majority of that 27% (more than 90%) were from regional markets.*

*In January, occupancy dropped right off, especially with the re-iterated non-essential travel recommendation. Looking forward, Tourism Whistler is anticipating very low visitation, with winter room nights anticipated to be down 60% -70% this season (compared to the 2018.19 winter season). It is likely the majority of future visitors will be from the local market, Whistler, Pemberton or Squamish, and regional Vancouver market. These markets book extremely last minute, as a result the current forecasts are very low.*

**34. There are groups from Ontario and Quebec here. Are there any repercussions to these groups of people coming here? Can the public do anything if they see these groups of people here?**

*At this time, there are no restrictions on inter-provincial travel to B.C. Whistler continues to encourage everyone to follow the recommendations of their provincial health authorities.*

*Everyone in B.C., regardless of their home address, is required to follow the public health orders and guidance. In B.C., there is a recommendation to avoid all non-essential travel. Our provincial health authorities have not made this an order but have instead encouraged everyone to decide if their travel is essential.*

*In Whistler, this means that a lot of time and energy can be put into judging who should and shouldn't be here. As we experienced in the spring, we can't control others' decisions on whether or not to follow these recommendations. We can only control our own actions and decisions.*

*Please put your energy into following the public health orders. As Dr. Henry says, this is not the time to be finding loopholes, this is the time to make sure we are doing everything we can to make it hard for COVID-19 to spread in our community.*

*The most important steps to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in Whistler include:*

- o Avoiding social gatherings outside our immediate households.*
- o Maintaining physical distance from those not in our household.*
- o Wearing a mask in public indoor places and on the Village Stroll.*
- o Staying home if you have been told to self-isolate or if you have any symptoms of illness.*
- o Follow all provincial health orders and recommendations.*

**35. Knowing what is happening now, is there anything planned for the next long weekend? To hinder people from gathering outside of Whistler?**

*Dr. Henry has asked British Columbians to not make plans or book any travel or vacations over the upcoming Family Day weekend. Now is the time to pause and refocus our efforts towards stopping the spread of this virus.*

## Business & Local Impact Questions

**36. Why aren't we hearing from more businesses in town when workers are sick? It seemed like late last year this was happening regularly, however now when a business notifies the community it's more the exception than the rule. What changed?**

*Businesses are not required to disclose cases. Many have been volunteering to share this information as part of their own practice.*

*During contact tracing, our Public Health team does a thorough assessment of where the person has been during their infections period and if there was any risk of public exposure. Depending on the type of interactions a case has had and the measures and safety plans in place at the time, we are often able to identify and notify all close contacts directly and determine there is no further risk. Public health only issues public exposure alerts if they have determined there was a risk of public exposure and they are not able to contact everyone who may have been exposed.*

**37. There has been provincial advice not to travel for non-essentials? I want to ask why ski school is running programs on the winter that are basically full of people from Vancouver. Is this not giving people more reason to break this provincial advice?**

*Like everyone we, Whistler Blackcomb, are doing the best that we can to deliver the products that we offer and access to the mountains. We continue to have select ski school programs available because if someone is here to ski they will choose to ski whether we're offering ski school or not. From our position we have put a lot of thought into how we can do a very low ratio program for a student and get them exposed to the mountain in a safe environment, both as it relates to ski and snowboarding ability and as it relates to Covid-19.*

*We've had to pull back on a lot of our programming to ensure we had the capacity to deliver the programs that remain available. There were some areas that we felt it was best to not do certain programs as our ability to deliver would diminish with the more that we took on.*

*Under the guidance of Vancouver Coastal Health, we have put strict COVID-19 protocols in place which include mandatory mask-wearing indoors and outdoors on the mountain, limiting capacity in gondolas and on chairlifts, and physical distancing in lift lineups.*

**15. Does the vacancy rate shared by Tourism Whistler include the number of people in Airbnbs, timeshares, rental townhomes, second homes, holiday homes/condos here? Where can I find data on short term vacation rentals?**

*Tourism Whistler estimates Whistler has just over 5,800 units available for nightly rental. These would include hotels, bed & breakfasts, holiday homes and condos available for short term rental.*

*Approximately 2/3 of these units participate in Tourism Whistler's accommodation data sharing program. The program participants include hotels and property management companies but excludes independent owner-direct rentals, and also excludes illegal home*

*rentals in residential neighborhoods. The accommodation metrics Tourism Whistler reports on are extrapolated from this sample to represent the full resort inventory.*

*Whistler's accommodation data is propriety to the participating properties so reports are only shared with Tourism Whistler's accommodation partners. However, some seasonal metrics are made available to the general public via presentations and media reporting.*