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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

### **B.C. takes next step in balanced plan to lift COVID-19 restrictions**

VICTORIA – As people in B.C. continue to step up and become vaccinated in record numbers, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have decreased, leading the provincial health officer to lift additional public health orders.

As of Friday, March 11, 2022, B.C.'s indoor mask order is being repealed along with eased restrictions on long-term care visitors, faith gatherings and overnight camps for children and youth. Today's announcement also sets a pathway to lift additional COVID-19 restrictions, including the BC Vaccine Card requiring proof of vaccination, on April 8.

"British Columbians have made tremendous sacrifices and worked hard to do their part over the past two years by following the advice and direction of Dr. Henry," said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. "Thanks to high levels of vaccination, decreasing transmission enabled by British Columbians' resolve and the public health orders we've had in place, we are now able to lift more restrictions and continue moving forward as a province."

Effective March 11, 2022, at 12:01 a.m., the following changes will be made to public health orders:

- Face coverings order: Face coverings will be optional for people in all indoor public settings. People may want to continue wearing a mask based on personal choice.
  - Individual businesses and organizations can choose to continue to require mask wearing on their premises.
- Gatherings and events for faith gatherings: The requirement of faith communities to restrict attendance based on vaccination status is no longer required.
- Indoor common area mask requirements for employees as part of the Workplace Safety Order will no longer be required. Employers may choose to continue to require wearing masks for operational reasons or in certain settings.
- Overnight camps for children and youth order requirements: COVID-19 safety plans are no longer required to be submitted to a medical health officer for overnight camps.
- Masks are encouraged on public transit and BC Ferries but are no longer required under public health order.

Changes are also coming to B.C.'s long-term care facilities. By March 18, the number of visitors to long-term care facilities will no longer be restricted as long as visitors are fully vaccinated and screened. Some facilities will be able to implement these changes earlier. Visitors should check with their local care home.

"Vaccines are the primary tool in our toolbox for managing COVID-19 in the long term and people have stepped up in a big way to get vaccinated, which has made a huge difference in

creating high levels of immunity and protection across the province,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “As we move through this transition period and lift restrictions, we encourage people to respect the comfort levels of those around them.”

COVID-19 guidelines are being adjusted to advise that mask use is no longer required when K-12 students return from spring break. Dates for return from spring break vary by school district. Similarly, public health is working with the child care sector to revise guidelines. However, students and staff are supported to continue to use masks and other layers of protection based on their own comfort and risk factors.

Easing restrictions is based on ongoing and careful review of data by the provincial health officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC). This includes a significant decrease in weekly hospital admissions (from 877 to 391) and 34% decrease in critical care admissions (from 121 to 80) in the past month.

In addition, effective April 8, 2022, at 12:01 a.m., the following changes will also be made to public health orders:

- Showing the BC Vaccine Card proof of vaccination to access non-essential events, services and businesses will no longer be required.
  - Individual businesses and organizations can choose to continue to require the BC Vaccine Card proof on their premises.
- The remainder of the Workplace Safety Order will be lifted, which means businesses will transition back to communicable disease plans to reduce risk of all communicable disease.
- The requirement for students residing in residence to be fully vaccinated under the Post-secondary Institution Housing COVID-19 Preventative Measures Order will be repealed.

Vaccinations remain the primary layer of protection that has limited severe health outcomes from COVID-19. As of March 10, 2022, 93.3% (4,322,690) of eligible people 12 and older in B.C. have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, 90.7% (4,204,895) received their second dose and 55.7% (2,580,562) have received a third dose.

B.C. has also increased the supply of rapid tests, helping people monitor and manage mild COVID-19 symptoms at home.

The Province, provincial health officer and the BCCDC will continue to monitor and provide updates on the COVID-19 pandemic in B.C. An update will be provided in the coming weeks about the daily information bulletin moving from daily to weekly reporting.

### **Learn More**

For the March 10, 2022, presentation on the COVID-19 update and the easing of restrictions, visit: [http://news.gov.bc.ca/files/COVID19\\_Presentation\\_22-03-10.pdf](http://news.gov.bc.ca/files/COVID19_Presentation_22-03-10.pdf)

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