

West Coast Communities Are Keeping Health and Safety Top of Mind with Adherence to Latest Provincial Recommendations

Residents and Visitors Urged to Cease Non-Essential Travel; West Coast Leaders Thank the Community for “Showing Your Love”

Pacific Rim, B.C. – As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise throughout British Columbia, West Coast communities are working together to support the most recent recommendation issued by the Provincial Health Office (PHO) on November 19, 2020 restricting all travel within the province, except for essential activities such as work or medical appointments, until December 7, 2020 at midnight.

“Our Nation has completely closed to visitors and we can’t forget that we are in a worldwide pandemic,” said Elmer Frank, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation Emergency Operations Centre Chairperson. “These measures have been put in place to keep our citizens safe, and our communities have sacrificed so much to make sure our most vulnerable residents stay safe. Like our members, we’re asking visitors to also please stay home for now.”

“I would like to thank the business community for how quickly they pivoted in light of the new health orders. We know how difficult this is coming into the Christmas season, but we also want to celebrate how well our community works together to support each other,” said acting Tofino Mayor, Britt Chalmers. “COVID-19 continues to pose a particular risk to rural and remote areas like ours with limited healthcare resources. We are joining the province-wide effort to stop the spread of the virus as we focus on the health and safety of our small communities by reminding West Coast residents to stay within the communities in which they reside or work and support local businesses as much as they can. In addition, we strongly encourage visitors to join us in our efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 by also staying home.”

According to BC Centre for Disease Control, there is a general increase in COVID-19 across BC, with a “concerning trend toward greater involvement of older adults.” As of November 19th, there were 76 active COVID-19 cases in the Central Vancouver Island health region, which includes Tofino, Ucluelet and adjacent communities where healthcare resources are limited. The Tofino General Hospital, which serves all communities in the region, is equipped with only 10 acute medical in-patient beds, 5 emergency room stretchers, and one ventilator. Patients requiring a higher level of care need to be transported to a hospital in a larger centre such as Nanaimo Regional General Hospital, which has been designated a regional COVID-19 cohort site.

“Since the recent provincial announcement, our West Coast communities have received an outpouring of support from people who love the area and understand the limited healthcare resources available out here,” said Mayco Noel, Mayor of Ucluelet. “As people’s plans are cancelled and rescheduled, we want to remind visitors that our local businesses have been wholly committed to following all orders and recommendations of health officials, and we’re working together as a region to make sure that we’re ready to welcome you again when the time is right.”

While many West Coast businesses remain open to residents, some tourism-facing businesses in both Tofino and Ucluelet are closing during this temporary no-travel period. Guests with upcoming reservations are strongly encouraged to follow all directives from senior levels of government and to contact their accommodation and tour providers to discuss rebooking options.

Throughout the pandemic, First Nations in Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds have also limited access to their communities and territories as necessary. In addition to echoing the provincial recommendations and COVID-19 safety protocols, West Coast residents have been asked to respect the specific requests not to enter into certain areas like Hesquiaht Harbour, Ahousaht territory, and Toquaht lands, until invited back.

“On a very tangible, personal level, the actions of every West Coast visitor and resident really matters right now,” said President Charles McCarthy of the Yuułuꞵiꞵꞵath Government. “The rising case numbers on Vancouver Island are very concerning, and we hope that everyone can see the value in respecting these temporary measures so that we can come together again as soon as possible.”

“The West Coast is a tight-knit community and we’re relying on each other to make choices that keep our region safe,” said Chief Anne Mack. “We know that Toquaht territory include some very special places to the residents of the West Coast, and I sincerely want to thank everyone who continues to respect our request not to visit Toquaht lands until we know it is safe to host you again.”

This past summer, West Coast Vancouver Island communities launched the “Show Your Love” campaign — a collaborative effort to send a message that the COVID-19 pandemic “knows no boundaries and doesn’t go on vacation, even in Canada’s premier beach destinations.” In accordance with last week’s updated directives, the campaign has now been extended to embrace the most recent provincial travel recommendations. We thank local residents and visitors for following all COVID-19 safety protocols including regular hand sanitizing, physical distancing and wearing masks when physical distancing is not possible, including in stores and attractions.

Thank you for staying safe, kind, and calm.

Background:

- General information about the Covid-19 on Vancouver Island communities can be found at www.islandhealth.ca/covid19.
- Up-to-date information for travellers to the West Coast can be found at the Tourism Tofino and Tourism Ucluelet websites.

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