

September 15, 2021

Management of COVID-19 Cases and Potential Exposures at UBC Vancouver

At the start of Winter Session, Term 1, news circulated that a handful of students had informed faculty members that they had tested positive for COVID-19. Indeed, we have received such reports from time to time, over the course of the pandemic. Fortunately, Public Health has been able to manage these situations well, and they have not evolved into major clusters of cases. With more people on campus there may be heightened sensitivity to the numbers because we learn of them in our classes. However, we have had cases since March of 2020, and the dominant mode of transmission then, as now, has been contact in social settings – not the classroom.

At UBC, with over 80,000 students, faculty and staff, it is very likely that positive COVID-19 cases and small clusters of cases amongst members of our community will occur, as with other communities of this size. We can minimise this by continuing to remind people of the public health orders in place and reinforce the importance of vaccination, staying home when feeling sick, and conducting daily health self-assessments.

Cases of COVID-19, in the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region, continue to be predominantly associated with transmission in social settings. Classroom settings are considered to be lower risk; but for all COVID-19 cases on campus, there are steps taken by Public Health to limit transmission:

1. Public Health follows up every person who tests positive for COVID-19 within 24 hours (they are notified by the lab within hours of the test being completed). They take a detailed history from the person to identify their close contacts during their infectious period. Public Health then reaches out to those close contacts to provide specific actions to prevent spread, such as self-isolation or self-monitoring, depending on the contacts' vaccination status. A close contact is generally someone who has been near a person with COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes when health and safety measures were not in place or were insufficient.
2. In the case of an infected person having been on campus, those who were not close contacts do not have a substantially increased risk of acquiring COVID-19 in the Public Health assessment. They are not contacted by Public Health and can continue to participate in all of their regular activities.
3. On occasion, Public Health reaches out to UBC for assistance with notification of cases. This occurs when institutional action is required; for instance, when Public Health is not assured that they have a complete list of all direct contacts. Public Health reaches out to the institutional contact who will be able to assist (for example, UBC Student Housing leadership regarding a case attending a student housing event). UBC will not be contacted or informed about every case occurring amongst students, faculty or staff members.
4. In a more serious outbreak or cluster situation, Public Health has many tools at its disposal. For example, it may direct UBC to limit access to buildings, move classes on line, close laboratories, or undertake other measures, depending on the nature of the situation.

If a student informs a faculty or staff member that they have been confirmed to have COVID-19, these are the steps that should be taken:

- Inform Student Health Services, Dr. Marna Nelson at marna.nelson@ubc.ca of the case.
- Ensure that the student is provided with concessions and support as required to continue learning whilst unable to attend class.
- Follow all instructions from Public Health, if directed by them (in most cases, the faculty member will not be contacted because Public Health has made all necessary notifications directly).

- In the case of a more concerning exposure, Public Health may direct UBC to move to on-line delivery to support isolation of a class. All contemplated course delivery changes must be discussed with the Department Head/School Director.

Some faculty members have expressed concern that they have an obligation to inform others of news that there may have been an exposure, irrespective of Public Health's management of the situation. In this situation, these are steps that can be taken:

- If there is a belief that general information should be provided to the class and if the student has given permission to do so, the matter should be referred to the Department Head, School Director, or Administrator. They will reach out to ready.ubc@ubc.ca to determine whether information should be provided, and if so, what it should include.
- Department Heads, School Directors, and Administrators are invited to contact Safety and Risk Services at ready.ubc@ubc.ca for more information and guidance.
- Private information about a person, including their health status, should not be shared without consent. See the fact sheet, Disclosing Personal Information for Health and Safety Reasons at: <https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2015/05/Fact-Sheet-Disclosing-PI-for-Health-and-Safety.pdf>.

If a faculty or staff member informs you that they have been confirmed to have COVID-19, these are the steps that you should take:

- Inform Human Resources – Employee Relations, at [Director, Employee & Labour Relations](#) or Faculty Relations, at [Director, Faculty Relations](#) as appropriate.
- Ensure the faculty or staff member is provided with support as required.
- Follow all instructions from Public Health, if directed by them (in most cases, you will not be contacted because Public Health has made all necessary notifications directly and there is nothing more to do).

As a reminder, students, faculty and staff who are asymptomatic can participate in the research-based COVID-19 rapid testing clinic in the I. K. Barber Learning Centre. Information about the clinic, appointment booking, and hours of operation can be found here: <http://www.housing.ubc.ca/rapidtest/>. (Please note that the researchers providing this clinic have temporarily stopped the program. They expect to resume operations shortly and are aiming for later this week. They apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.)

Symptomatic (<http://www.vch.ca/covid-19/covid-19-testing>) students, faculty and staff must undergo PCR testing at a Vancouver Coastal Health designated site (www.vch.ca/covid-19/covid-19-testing). Student Health Services and UBC Hospital Urgent Care can also complete PCR testing albeit with limited capacity. The wait times for the Vancouver Coastal Health collection centres can be found here: www.edwaittimes.ca/covidtestingwaittime.aspx.

Other relevant information:

- Information on UBC's seven institutional safety plans can be found here: <https://srs.ubc.ca/covid-19/covid-19-safety-plans/>
- Campus Rules can be found here: <https://riskmanagement.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/09/COVID19-Campus-Rules.pdf>
- Information on the vaccination status declaration and rapid testing program requirements can be found here: <https://president.ubc.ca/blog/2021/09/09/declaration-of-vaccination-status/>
- Information on the use of non-medical masks can be found here: <https://srs.ubc.ca/covid-19/>

Please email questions to ready.ubc@ubc.ca