

TIMES COLONIST

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Victoria, British Columbia

Showers. High 9. Low 4. Details, A12

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Metchosis residents and fire chief want changes to how 911 calls are handled >A3

Whether it's wise to travel by plane during a pandemic >A10

Drawn to the Uptown vibe



People bask in the sunshine and bubble lifestyle at the esplanade at Uptown. As Greater Victoria sees growth in all directions, a number of downtown businesses have used the pandemic lull to expand and set up shop at Uptown. Story, B1 ADRIAN LARA, TIMES COLONIST

Province to improve cellular service from Sooke to Port Renfrew

DARRON KLOSTER
Times Colonist

A notorious cell phone dead zone between Sooke and Port Renfrew should be eliminated by fall.

The province said wireless infrastructure along a 70-kilometre stretch of Highway 14 will be in place by Oct. 31, connecting more than 1,200 households as well as emergency responders and the thousands of travellers who frequent the beaches and trails along the route.

The project will also bring cellular service to Port Renfrew, Shirley, Otter Point and Jordan River, as well as the Pacheedaht First Nation communities of Gordon River 2 and Pachwena 1.

A highway rest area near the entrance to Sombrio Beach, a popular surfing hotspot, will be upgraded to provide a Wi-Fi connection, improving safety and convenience for people passing through or coming to enjoy a view of the ocean or a hike down the trails, the province said.

The announcement is being welcomed by first responders. "Like so many emergency responders, [we] have come to rely upon cellular service for voice and data communications," said Vickie Weber, senior manager of Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue. "Many online resources enhance our capability and response to people who may be having a life-threatening emergency."

"We know it will have a significant impact on any [search-and-rescue] emergency along this route," she said.

Funding for the project is from the province's Stronger B.C. Economic Recovery Plan, which included a one-time \$90-million grant to the Connecting British Columbia program to expand high-speed internet and cellular access in rural and Indigenous communities.

The Connecting British Columbia program provides grants that help service providers with the costs of building infrastructure.

Rogers Communications has been selected to receive up to \$4.9 million to build the cell tower infrastructure.

In a statement, Premier John Horgan, whose riding includes the area, said a cellular signal provides "peace of mind knowing you can stay in touch ... and call for help if it's needed. This investment will make a real difference for people."

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Another day of more than 1,000 new COVID cases in B.C.

Three deaths added to provincial tally, one of them on Island; more vaccines roll out

CINDY E. HARNETT
Times Colonist

Unnecessary travel and social gatherings are "fueling the fire" of COVID-19 and its variants of concern, the province's top doctor said Tuesday.

Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer, reported 1,068 new cases of COVID-19, including 73 on the Island. There are 8,671 active cases and another 14,118 people under public health monitoring as a result of identified exposure to known cases. Another three people have died in the province, one of which was on the Island, for a total of 1,489.

Henry reported 207 new variants of concern for a total of 3,766.

Cases are surging, people are having more contacts, and more are ending up in hospital, Henry said at a media briefing.

"We know that much of this transmission is happening in younger people, so that means numbers of younger people in hospital has increased and numbers of younger people needing ICU care has increased, and that is concerning," said Henry.

"It is because these variants transmit more easily that we are seeing more people becoming ill in those numbers of contacts that they're having — and proportionally more people requiring hospitalization and critical care."

There have been 912,056 doses of vaccine administered, 87,474 of which were second doses.

As of Tuesday, there were 352 new cases of COVID-19 in Vancouver Coastal, 192 in Fraser Health, 73 in Island Health, 106 in the Interior region, 43 people in Northern Health.

Henry reported 328 people were in hospital with the virus, 96 in critical or intensive care.

Most of the variants of concern are in Fraser Health where the U.K. variant dominates, followed by Vancouver Coastal where the Brazil strain dominates. There have been 20 cases in total on the Island, including 13 of the U.K. strain, six of the Brazil strain, and one of the South African strain.

The median age of people who test positive for variants of concern is 35, said Dix.

Of the 328 people in hospital with COVID, 63 have been

identified as having variants of concern, the majority of which, 42, are the U.K. variant and 20 the Brazil variant.

The U.K. strain is dominant, said Henry.

"It is found all over B.C., in much smaller numbers outside of the Lower Mainland, but it certainly is being found everywhere."

In Ontario, about 60 per cent of all new cases have the U.K. strain "and we're probably a month or so behind Ontario in getting there. ... It's the way viruses evolve over time."

There have not been new cases of the South African variant in some time, said Henry.

"Let's ensure we don't lose any more ground," said Henry, asking people to stick to their household contacts and if seeing others to do so outside, and to keep groups small.

On March 29, the province hit the pause button on AstraZeneca vaccinations for those under age 55, delaying a rollout for hundreds of thousands frontline workers including teachers and grocery store workers.

The province didn't want to hold up use of the AstraZeneca vaccine and decided to offer the

vaccine to those 55 to 65 through pharmacies in the Lower Mainland.

Health Canada asked for more study of the AstraZeneca vaccine following a possible link to vaccine induced rare blood clots reported in Europe.

In the meantime, the province is working on extending its distribution of AstraZeneca on the Lower Mainland to those 55 to 65 years of age. That program is destined to roll out this week for other parts of the province, including Victoria, Parksville and Nanaimo.

"We expect by Thursday or Friday of this week vaccine will be in those communities at participating pharmacies and ready for administration to those aged 55 to 65," said Dix.

Information on participating pharmacies will be provided by health authorities and the B.C. Pharmacy Association, "so stay tuned for that," he said.

Public health officials are looking at whether essential workers can be streamed through pharmacies where the AstraZeneca will be distributed. "We will be looking at that in the next little while," said Henry. ceharnett@timescolonist.com

Nanaimo woman shot in face while trying to help friend in distress

LOUISE DICKSON
Times Colonist

A Nanaimo woman was shot in the face and hand early Saturday morning when she intervened with a friend in distress at her

family home.

Friends say Regina Hampson intervened when her roommate tried to kill himself with a loaded 12-gauge shotgun.

"There was a loaded gun involved, and she went to

remove that gun from him. ...

And in that process, the gun had gone off," Michael Mercer told CHEK News.

Hampson was shot in the face and hand.

"It was incredibly selfless

and heroic that she gave no regard for her own safety," said Jo-Lynne Wikkerink, who has started an online fundraising page for Hampson. "Her friend was in danger and she intervened."

Hampson, who is in hospital

in Vancouver, is in a great deal of pain, her partner Jason Culley said Tuesday in a video update. Doctors plan to operate today to try to save her right eye.

>See LONG RECOVERY, A2

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