

September 7, 2021

B.C. Vaccine Card

Press Conference Transcript

Horgan: I'm joined today by MOH Dix and PHO Henry to talk about more details around the announcement we made two weeks ago about the implementation of a BC vaccine card. At the outset, I want to say that people have been responding to that announcement by rolling up their sleeves and we've had a 200% increase in the number of people registered for vaccines. Dix will have the decimal point but as of today 85% of British Columbians over the age of 12 have received a first dose, and 78% have received two doses. This is very good news. An extraordinary effort by all British Columbians. I want to commend the Public Health team for putting in place a vaccination program that was safe, effective, and seamless for the vast majority of British Columbians. Vaccines are a vital tool in our toolkit to put covid-19 behind us.

Over the past 19 months, we've been taking extraordinary steps to keep people safe, to reduce the impact on our healthcare system, and keep our businesses open to the greatest extent possible. The implementation of a BC vaccine card will allow us to ensure that those non-essential businesses that have been adversely affected by lockdowns and shutdowns and public health orders can now confidently say to their patrons that have been double vaccinated that they are operating a business that is safe for them to enter and enjoy a meal, enjoy the theatre, go to a sporting event.

These initiatives are critically important to our success going forward and I'm very excited about the prospects of the next number of months. These measures that we are putting in place will be mirrored in other jurisdictions across Canada. Already Quebec, and Ontario and Manitoba are underway. I'm absolutely confident that other provinces will join in and the federal government, following the outcome of the September 20th election, will also be taking steps to finalize the initiatives that they have already undertaken at the administrative level to make sure that those who are travelling outside of Canada can do so confidently, with immunization data available to other countries, and those who are coming into Canada will also be able to prove that they have taken steps to protect themselves and their loved ones by getting two vaccines.

But we have seen an unacceptable surge in covid cases, largely among those who have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated, and I encourage all British Columbians to weigh against their particular point of view today the positive benefits of following so many other British Columbians, getting vaccinated to protect yourself, to protect your families, and allowing us all to move forward, keeping our economy going, making sure that jobs are still there for people as we go forward into what will be, I'm hopeful, an absolutely terrific 2022 and beyond.

But in order for that to happen we all have to unite once again, with a common purpose, to see the BC vaccine card as a way to get to those places where we want to be. At a sporting event. At the theatre. Going out to a movie. Having dinner with some friends. Large gatherings can take place with double vaccinations, and I want to tell British Columbians that there are many things that the vaccine card is, but they are many things they are certainly not. And one of them is not to impede services based on, from government. You do not have to be concerned about not being able to access provincial services, municipal services, because you've only had one vaccine, or you've had no vaccines at all. So, this is not taking away something. It's adding to what you are able to do and those are the things most of us enjoy so much. So, let's focus on that. Let's focus on making sure we get those numbers up from 85% to 90%

and beyond. And we do that by focusing on all of the benefits that the BC vaccine card can bring to British Columbia. And with that, I'll ask Henry to go into some of the more intimate details about how this this is going to operate the next number of weeks.

Henry: Thank you very much, Premier, and good afternoon. As people here know, the responsibility and focus of our teams and PH across the province have been to monitor, reduce risks, take steps to protect the health of everybody here in British Columbia. When it comes to covid-19, it's all about that balance, our goals have always been to reduce sickness and death from the virus, to make sure our healthcare system is not overwhelmed, so that people with covid, but also people with every other health issue can get the care that they need. And of course, to minimize the disruption of society because we know that has effects on our health, our mental health, and our physical health.

As we all know, it's not easy and we have tried to find that balance of making sure we have enough restrictions in place to stop and slow the transmission of the virus, as well as allowing as much as possible to happen. To keep society open and functioning. We want to reduce the risk for everybody, and balance that with minimizing disruption. And this is the balance we have worked hard to achieve and right now, at this phase in the pandemic, we have another tool in our toolbox. We have vaccination. And vaccinations have been proving very very successful in helping us stem the transmission and importantly preventing people from having severe illness and ending up in hospital and ICU.

But we are not yet at a point where we can let down our guard. And we have an additional effective tool that has changed the role. I think we need to recognize that nobody likes this virus. That we are not happy that we are here right now. But we also need to recognize that some have carried a much greater burden. Loved ones have been lost, businesses have been closed, and jobs have gone away. And healthcare workers, my colleagues across this province, have been put to the test. We know now that these vaccines are safe, are effective, and they make a difference in stopping transmission, stopping people from getting sick and ill. And getting vaccinated and showing proof of vaccination will help protect all of us. It protects those people who are not yet old enough to be immunized, our children, so that they can have a normal school year. It protects the people whose immune system aren't functioning as well so that they can continue. And it protects our elders and seniors, and we've seen that again in areas in the province where we've had pockets of people who are not yet vaccinated.

It can still spread very rapidly and the risk of people who are not yet vaccinated is much much higher as we've seen. It's 12x greater risk of infection. 34x greater risk of ending up in hospital compared to the same aged person. This vaccine card is another tool that we have that allows us to continue to do things safely in those businesses and one of the ways that we can reduce our risk going into the fall season. Ultimately, the choice is yours, about whether you choose to be vaccinated or not, but what we need to do is make sure that we can continue to keep things open as much as possible, and that's what the BC vaccine card is all about.

Without the card, optional discretionary social, recreational events and activities might have needed even more restrictions and measures that what we have in place today as we are moving into the fall. So, this proof of vaccination will take effect on September 13th. Between the 13th and 24th of October, people with one-dose will be able to access these discretionary social recreational events and activities. And then after October 24th, it'll be fully vaccinated people, people with two doses or some people who may have receive the single dose J&J in the past.

We have put the vaccine card in place, as I said, to keep businesses open, to keep people working, and most importantly, to keep people safe. If you've not yet been vaccinated, that is your choice, but these essential activities and services will remain open for you. Just as the case has been for the last 20 months, you will have alternatives to participate in the settings where proof of vaccination will be required. In order, however, to minimize disruption for as many people as possible, and make these discretionary events and activities as safe as possible, these are where proof of vaccination will be required. So, let me share the details.

As of September 13th, I will have new PHOs in place requiring proof of at least one-vaccine to access these businesses and events. I will say until September 27th you can use our new BC vaccine card and I will have more details about that. Or you can also show your vaccine record. The card or paper that you received when you were immunized.

As of October 24th, you'll be required to present your BC vaccine card showing you're fully immunized to access this same list. So, what we're talking about are: indoor ticketed sporting events, so whether you want to see the Canucks or the Lions; indoor concerts, theatre, dance, and symphony events, so that we can get back to the Arts events we are so missing. And being able to do it in a way we can reassure each other is safe. Licensed restaurants, including indoor and patio dining, and cafes, and restaurants that have table services.

So, what is not here are fast food restaurants, food courts, cafeterias, where people grab good and go or drive thru. We know that those are a much different situations, people are there for much shorter periods of time and it's not practical to require somebody to check a vaccine card in those settings. We also are including nightclubs, casinos, and areas where people now will be able to be re-assured, they can go to these places more safely. Movie theaters as well. We're including some of these high-risk settings that have so impacted businesses including fitness centres, business offering indoor rec classes, indoor high intensity classes like spin classes. This will be that added layer of protection so that business don't have continuing clusters and outbreaks and aren't needed to be closed during this coming fall. As well, importantly, organized indoor events. So, right now there are gathering limits, starting at 50, so weddings, parties, meetings, conferences, workshops, that are indoor events where people are gathering together with the public. And discretionary organized indoor group recreation classes and activities. These are the activities, like seniors' fitness classes, for example, where you will now need to show proof of vaccination to attend those safely.

As you can see, with all of these, we have learned different ways of participating. So, if you choose not to be immunized, then there is ways you can support your local restaurants by continuing to do takeout, by participating in outdoor exercise activities, or online activities. As well as watching your favourite Canucks game on TV.

So, what is the BC vaccine card? It is a card that will allow people to conveniently and securely show their proof of vaccination using either a digital, as you can see here, or a paper version. It will show whether you are either fully vaccinated, partially vaccinated, or no record found. It is very simple, I know many people tried today, as did I, to enter in some basic information and a card will come up. It will have QR code, which is scannable, so it's a scannable square-shaped image like barcode technology, that is readable by a device like a smart phone. But it also will be a paper copy, that you can use and verify. And I'll show you a picture in a minute. There will be a transition period as I mentioned, until September

27th, for vaccinated people to obtain their BC vaccine card. During this time, your paper record that you got at your immunization clinic will still be able to be used.

So, here's how you do it. Starting today, and we started this morning with a soft launch, you take these steps: you can either go to gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard and you enter your PHN, birth date, and date of one vaccine dose. That's how we verify who you say you are. Then you get your BC vaccine card. You can save it to your mobile device. You can save it to your computer. You can print it. You can save it, as I learned this morning, by pressing a screenshot and swiping so that it goes onto the pictures in your phone. And then you have your vaccine card ready to present when you go to one of these events or businesses that requires it. For those who have already signed on to the health gateway, you can actually go on very easily through the health gateway, but you don't need to sign on to the health gateway to get your card. Very simply by going to this website on your phone.

So, this is what it looks like. It'll come up on your phone that you've either received both doses of a two dose vaccine series, or one dose of the J&J vaccine series. That you're partially vaccinated. Or that there is no record. So what you'll see is very minimal information with a QR code and your name. And those are the important pieces of information that allows a business to verify whether you have been vaccinated or not. It's important that the website can be used to print your BC vaccine card by following the same steps and printing from a computer or phone. And we know that many people aren't so tech savvy with the phone so there are other ways you can do it. You can do it on a computer. You can ask a friend or family member, and we really encourage people to do that, to assist you, to print your BC vaccine card.

For those who don't have access to a computer or smart phone, you can call our provincial vaccine line at 18338382323 and we will help walk you through it and send you a printed card in the mail. Or you can visit one of the 64 BC service centers around BC who can also print your card for you. I do want to say, we know there will be some people who have challenges with this and to be patient in the first few days. This service will be available over the next number of weeks. We have a period of time where we are transitioning in where you can still use your vaccine card that you received when you received your immunization.

But there are many different ways you can get this card. You do not have to have to download an app onto your phone to get your personal BC vaccine card. And then when you arrive at a business that requires proof of vaccination you have either your digital or paper copy ready and you'll be asked to display it, with a piece of valid government ID that just confirms it is the same person. That you are the same person for whom that vaccine information applies to. We are not going to be requiring government ID for those 12-18, as we know that can be a challenge at that age, so you'll just need to show your proof of vaccination. Families and caregivers and friends, you can download, grandparents, you can download others copies on your phone with you, or you can have multiple paper copies or on mobile device or paper.

From a business perspective, for verifying a BC vaccine card, you have two options. These two options will be the same throughout the process where we have this temporary measure in place. Option 1 is you can download an app that will allow you to scan the QR code. And really importantly, this BC verification app, and I'll talk a bit more about it, allows you to scan but doesn't allow you to collect any information. Or you can verify it visually by looking at what is on the paper copy. The BC vaccine verifier app will be ready starting next week, and it will be downloadable from Google or from the App store and

you will be able to verify vaccination status using this app and then look at the person's ID, to make sure that they are the person whose card you have scanned. The app only reads the covid-19 vaccination information. No additional health information is stored on the app or on the smart phone somebody uses to scan. And it's available as I mentioned for Apple, or Android devices starting on September 13th. So, this is kind of what it looks like. One, you download the app onto your phone and you allow access to the camera. Then you use that to either scan the paper copy or the phone copy someone has when they come into your business, your restaurant, and it tells your step three, on the right. What it will come up with is a green sign that says vaccinated, a blue sign that says partially vaccinated, or no record found. So, it's very simple and then you can go on and scan the next one.

So, businesses as I mentioned, can also visually verify either the digital or paper copy of the BC vaccine card, like checking for proof of age for alcohol sales. You can look at it directly and confirm that it is the person. And for people, as I mentioned, aged 19 and above you will have to have government issued ID to show you are the person associated with that QR code. As I mentioned, we will be transitioning over the period of the next three weeks, up until September 30th you can still use your paper record. But these paper records we know have more information that is visible to people, and we know the QR code is more secure as it is directly related to the information that is stored in our registry. So started September 27th, the BC vaccine card will be the only accepted form of proof.

Businesses, however, will still have the option of viewing or scanning the digital BC vaccine card. I know that this is a challenge for all of us right now. Everything new means that there's new things we have to try out, we need to work out the kinks. We've been working with a number of business organizations in the past couple of weeks to put this in place, to make this as simple as possible. We have information for businesses, including step by step instructions that is found on the gov.bc.ca website at vaccinecard-businesses, and we encourage businesses to reach out to their associations and to go online to get more information. As well, we will be launching an information call line for business specifically, starting next week, we will be able to take information and share it on the website. The questions, the issues that are coming up, the best practices that people are using. So that is part of our commitment to engage with businesses as we go through this in the next week, and as we roll this out over the next few months. One of the things that we have been most concerned about, as we were developing the concept around this, is privacy and security.

So, the BC vaccine card is designed using the global smart health card framework, which is internationally recognized criteria for ensuring privacy and security. It uses these QR codes to keep a copy of your record on hand, and you have the option of sharing that information with people. We are requiring businesses to use the BC app, which has very limited information, so it only comes up with a report that tells you whether you are vaccinated or not so the business know. There is no downloading of information and there is no connection to other health information that you might have. This type of technology has been widely used for proof of covid vaccinations, very similar to Quebec and other places are using as well. And it is a framework that other provinces and territories will be building on and that we're working with the federal government to make sure that this is the card that you will use eventually when the federal app for international travel becomes more available. It will be interoperable with that. You will be able to access your QR code with the needed information that you'll need to travel internationally once that is in place. These standards store absolutely only the minimum information and are not connected to any other health records. But you still need to keep them secure as you would a copy of your vaccine card that has your information on them. Don't boast your QR code

on social media. If somebody does try to use it though, it has your name on it, that's why we have the ID verification.

We know as well that our immunization registry that we've delivered over 7.5 million vaccines that some people may be missing doses or incorrect info – if there is a problem with your record, you can update it on the website as well. immunizationrecord.gov.bc.ca. This also is for people who are returning to BC, who are students, who have been vaccinated outside of BC. You can go to this and update and submit your immunization records and that will enable you to get your BC vaccine card. Submitting this information is very simple, it takes less than 5 minutes, and we will be adding that into the immunization registry so that you can access your BC vaccine card as quick as possible. Realistically, if we get a large number of people who are doing this it may take several days, 4-7 days, before that can happen. That's one of the reasons we have a grace period over the next few months. As well, people who are out of province, we have ways to ensure that we can accept their proof of vaccination, especially from other Canadian provinces and territories. You have to show your provincial or territorial vaccine record, and we will have copies of those available for businesses available on the business website so that they know what they are looking for. As well as corresponding government ID. And the same goes for people in the Canadian Armed Forces who are immunized through their workplace. They can show their military ID and their vaccine card. And for international visitors, all of them have to have proof of immunization on the ArriveCan app. And they can use that with their passport as a way of showing they are immunized. We have tried to make this as simple and as practice as possible. To make it as easy as possible for those of who are immunized who obtained the record, and for businesses to be able to efficiently scan them.

As you know, PHOs are still in place. This will supplement what we need to do right now as we are moving forward with the BC vaccine card. That means masks will continue to be required in indoor public places for 12+, as they have been. That is that added layer of protection we need right now with the transmission that we are seeing. As well we still have capacity limits that are in place under the events and gathering order. That means 50 people or 50% capacity, whichever is greater. But what we hope, as we move through this next few months with the BC vaccine card, is that once it is only immunized people that are at these discretionary events, these social events, these businesses, we will be able to remove those capacity limits. Because we know that we have mitigated the risk so much of transmission because people are protected in those settings through immunizations. I will say as well that all PHOs are enforceable, and fines can be issues under the orders that we have in place now. They can be issued by a number of different officials, whether it's the community safety unit, our liquor and cannabis inspectors, environmental health officers, gaming investigators, conservation officers, and of course, public safety officers, our police officers.

Obviously the first line of defence is not to call the police, and the police are there to support us, support businesses, should somebody be disturbing the peace. And we have seen that on a few occasions, but we know that that is rare. And this really is about the ability for us to continue to come together and do these discretionary, important social events, arts events, sports events, together in a way that keeps each other safe. So, as I mentioned, these are time-limited, and the timing may change depending on how we progress. But we are hopeful that we'll be able to remove some of the restrictions and we'll take away that risk of having to shutdown or close events or businesses like we had to do last year as transmission increased through the fall.

The BC Vaccine Card, as I said, is another layer of protection, but it is not the only layer. Masks continue to be required and of course it goes without saying all of those important things we do, staying away if we are not feeling well ourselves, getting tested, washing hands, all of the things we have now learned as part of our day-to-day life getting through this pandemic are going to continually important. What the vaccine gives us is an alternative to more restrictive measures in many events and businesses and social situations. It gives us that opportunity to do things, in a way that is far closer to what existed before the covid-19 pandemic. I understand that people tired and frustrated with covid-19 and we are concerned with what lies ahead and what might happen next.

Right now, we need to focus on getting through this next phase and let's get angry at this virus, not at each other. And let's continue to support each other, whether that's supporting your local arts organization, your sports club, your local restaurant, whether you're vaccinated doing that in person or continuing to support them by watching online, by doing takeout from your local restaurant. We will get through this; this is another tool that we have. We know that these vaccines are very effective, and they are protecting people. They are protecting people from hospitalization and severe illness. And it's protecting our healthcare system. And we know that these are the tools will allow us to continue to come together and to have those interactions, to have those businesses, to have those events that we need in our lives. So, I encourage everybody to download their vaccine card over the next few days and we will be supporting businesses and working with you as we go through this next few months to get this implemented. We will get through this and will do that by doing what we have been doing all along here in BC. That is supporting each other and doing it with kindness and compassion. Thank you.

Dix: Thank you Horgan, Henry. Today, in BC, and it's a significant thing, 7,545,871 doses of covid vaccine have been administered all over our province. 85.1% of people have received their first dose. 77.6% have received their second dose. Indeed, in the period since we announced the BC vaccine card was coming, what we have seen is a significant increase in registrations. And I want to note who is leading the way. Leading the way are those 18-24, 85.5% of whom have been vaccinated with 1st dose and still this weekend leading in registrations and new bookings, that number will go up. This level of confidence, that more than 17/20 people have been immunized, is a reflection of the extraordinary work and the experience of immunizations by our talented teams at clinics everywhere in BC. By healthcare workers, by doctors, by nurses, by pharmacists, by the entire healthcare team. The performance has been excellent. It has been done with generosity and safety. I hear every day from some people, who in some cases are worried about the experience, no one likes to get a shot in general, and who have found the experience to be immeasurably positive in their lives, and the experience of going to an immunization clinic positive.

And I want to encourage everybody, everybody, today to join all of those people, to join that 85.1%, and get vaccinated against covid-19. Henry stated the numbers pretty clearly, 12x more likely to test positive for covid-19 if you're unvaccinated. 34x more likely, 34, to go to hospital. And when you consider what it takes to go to hospital and the significance of that, both for our healthcare system, but for you as an individual. I think the case is so profoundly strong right now if you haven't been vaccinated to get vaccinated, to book, to register, to register your appointment, or drop in at our many drop-in opportunities. This week focusing on young people, 12-17, 18-30, we are going to continue in working with school districts and working with our post secondary sector. There are more and more opportunities, particularly for young people to get vaccinated at this time. If you are one of the more than 140,000 over 60+, this is an important time as well. Because your level of risk should drive you to

make that decision. The BC vaccine card builds on the confidence that this vaccination campaign has shown. That confidence. It says that in our pandemic we are making the right choice by getting vaccinated. That we are making the best choices and that right now, especially with the surge in cases and in hospitalizations we've seen, primarily among groups of unvaccinated people, **we are doing exactly what is required to save lives and to save people's long-term health.** I think it's important to recognize that after all we've been through in the last many months, including launching the most remarkable and effective vaccination effort our province has never seen, getting the BC vaccine card is straightforward. Henry took you through that just a few moments ago. First, and this is the most important part, get vaccinated. Second, visit gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard and download or print a copy of our BC vaccine card and store it on our phone or print a paper copy. Now for any reason if you are not able to access the online website to download or print a card, we can still get our BC vaccine card. We can call 18338382323 to get a copy of our card mailed to us. We can ask a family member or trusted friend or support person to print the card for us. Or we can visit a service BC centre around BC to get one. And let's remember to always reach out and help those that might need our help in getting their BC vaccine card. The BC vaccine card is a critical new initiative at a key moment in our BC pandemic. And getting it is a step we are all taking together. One that will see us continue to adapt to make sure that we are not just able to get the card, but the businesses can use it to its full potential. To give us all additional confidence that when we are participating in events and activities, those around us are full vaccinated as well. The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on all of us, some of course, more than others. The road back continues to be long and challenging. The BC vaccine card is a welcome milestone, showing how far we have come and just as important we are all coming back together. Remember, today, if you haven't been vaccinated get vaccinated. Premier.