



Health care system braces for impact of new variant

As B.C. braces for the impact of the rapidly spreading Omicron variant, public health officials are taking additional measures to protect health care services.

Beginning January 1, long-term care homes will be open to essential visitors only in an effort to reduce COVID-19 in those settings. Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry says that the new restrictions will be in place for a short a period as possible, and will be reviewed on January 18.

There are currently more than a dozen outbreaks in health care facilities, the majority in long-term care homes.

The government is also postponing non-urgent scheduled surgeries beginning on January 4 anticipating that COVID-related hospitalizations may rise and that more health care workers will be isolating or ill as a result of the highly transmissible virus circulating in the community.

On Friday, Dr. Henry clarified comments made earlier this week on whether she was considering measures under which health care workers could continue to work while experiencing mild symptoms of the virus, saying that such a scenario would be a last resort.

“Having people go to work sick is not something that we ever want to do and particularly not in health care,” said Henry.

HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard expects that health unions and health ministry officials will meet early in the new year to consider the broader implications of the rapidly spreading Omicron variant on the health care system and on health care workers.

“The weeks ahead are going to be very challenging for the health care system and for exhausted health care workers,” says Brisard. “Every effort must be taken to keep them safe and provide them with the support they need to deliver health care to British Columbians.”

Also on Friday, Dr. Henry said the isolation period for vaccinated individuals with COVID-19 will be reduced from seven to five days in cases where symptoms have resolved.

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