

## Booster campaign is our path forward

Op Ed - Dr. Sue Pollock, interim chief medical health officer, Interior Health

Since launching earlier this fall, B.C.'s COVID-19 booster dose campaign has seen nearly 800,000 shots delivered into the arms of people across the province.

We have moved more quickly and accelerated our efforts in Interior Health to make booster shots available: in particular, for those over 65 and whose health conditions or other factors put them at greater risk of illness.

This is good news, because as COVID-19 case numbers are rising quickly again in some areas, it is even more important that we do not lose our collective focus on vaccination.

As we learn about the new COVID-19 variant of concern, Omicron we are seeing it spread more easily than other variants. We expect it will be the dominant strain in B.C. in the coming weeks and months, just as Delta became prevalent this summer.

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada continue to be effective, even in the face of more transmissible variants. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has confirmed that being fully-vaccinated with two doses, followed by a booster shot six to eight months later, provides you with stronger, longer-lasting protection and immunity against variants now and in the future.

Another strength of the COVID-19 vaccines is protection against serious illness. The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control reports that unvaccinated people are 30 times more likely to require hospital care for COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated, and 50 times more likely to be admitted to critical care.

Throughout 2021, we saw incredible collaboration and creativity across Interior Health as volunteers, municipalities, local service organizations and so many others partnered with our health-care teams to set up and run vaccine clinics. As a result of these ongoing and monumental efforts, over 83 per cent of eligible residents age 12 and over in the Interior are fully immunized. This achievement is incredible – and we can't stop now.

In B.C., people receive an invitation by text or email from the province's *GetVaccinated* system when they are eligible for their booster shot. As we move into January and February, everyone 18+ will be notified, approximately six to eight months after they received their second dose.

Appointments are required in most Interior region clinics for boosters, although anyone still needing their first or second dose of vaccine can drop-in. To make it as convenient as possible, in addition to the vaccine clinics run by Interior Health, booster doses can be booked at pharmacies in several Interior region communities through the *GetVaccinated* system.

I know many of us had been looking forward to waving goodbye to the pandemic as we welcomed in 2022. Unfortunately, it's now clear that won't be the case and that COVID-19 is still very present in our lives.

However, we can continue to be confident in our path forward. Vaccines remain our best defence to protect ourselves and our loved ones, so make your New Year's resolution now: be kind, be calm, be safe ... and get your booster shot.

*To register for COVID-19 vaccination appointments in Interior Health, visit [GetVaccinated.gov.bc.ca](https://getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca) or [interiorhealth.ca](https://interiorhealth.ca) for more information.*

We recognize and acknowledge that we are collectively gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the seven Interior Region First Nations, where we live, learn, collaborate, and work together. This region is also home to 15 Chartered Métis Communities. It is with humility that we continue to strengthen our relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples across the Interior.