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It's time to (cautiously) return to normal after a tough year

Has the pandemic nearly run its course?

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Has the pandemic nearly run its course?

In the last while it seems we have been bombarded with messages from people declaring "we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel", "we have turned a corner", "vaccination programs work", and "everything is getting better". Is this optimism justified? Even if it is, will people feel comfortable going back to the "old normal" where we are physically close to our family, friends, and fellow participants in social situations?

Attesting to the importance of vaccination programs, the World Health Organisation says that "immunization is a global health and development success story, saving millions of lives every year. Vaccines reduce risks of getting a disease by working with your body's natural defences to build protection. When you get a vaccine, your immune system responds". Corroborating this idea, on the BC government website Immunization BC, they say, "Getting vaccinated dramatically reduces our chances of getting COVID-19 and provides near-perfect protection from hospitalization if we get COVID-19".

On June 16th Dr. Henry, BC's Provincial Health Officer said "76.5% of all adults in B.C. and 74.8% of those 12 years and older have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. In total, 4,231,871 doses of Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines have been administered in B.C., 768,008 of which are second doses".

The provincial government has laid out a 4-step plan to get us "back to normal" as much as possible based on lower numbers of COVID-19, and they believe the vaccination program is contributing to the reduction in cases and most importantly deaths.

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So, what are we going to do in the face of our changed reality? Some of us may be somewhat fearful about leaping back into a life not circumscribed by rules and guidelines meant to protect us from getting the disease. Also, many have adapted well to the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. They kept up their social connections through virtual means like zoom exercise classes, book clubs and social visits with family and friends.

Perhaps, though as one person I spoke to said, "don't be afraid to dip your toe back in" but do so by assessing the safety of the situation and your own comfort level.



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Many seniors before the pandemic saw the value in participating at a senior's centre or taking a program at an organization which provides seniors programming.

There is still a good argument to be made about why seniors should elect to return to those programs. Research has shown that it is important for seniors to stay engaged as it decreases the chance of becoming isolated. Social isolation and exclusion are related to serious negative health effects and reduced quality of life for seniors. We know that on site programs are an important vehicle for seniors in keeping socially connected.

On the North Shore, many organizations are looking at increasing their on-site programs and services for seniors in the coming months. They are doing this, keeping in mind any guidelines set by the government.

These organizations' own guidelines might set the bar higher. This may mean a few more months of wearing masks and physically distancing for program participants and staff. Organizations are keen to bring people back but want seniors to be comfortable in making their own personal decision to return. Being cautious is fine but weigh the benefits of returning against the negative effects of isolation.

Maybe like me you are looking forward to a time when any social situation, eating inside a restaurant on a rainy cold day, attending an on-site class, going to a movie theater, visiting friends and family indoors at their place or your own, going to a senior's organization are the norm again. Or maybe most importantly, being able to get a hug from a friend or family member.

When you feel comfortable though put your toe in the water and then jump back into the social milieu.

You might make a splash.

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