

Welcome to Vancouver Coastal Health: Health services for newcomers

Last updated: May 2023



Welcome to your new home

On behalf of Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), welcome to British Columbia (B.C.). Moving to a new province or country can be hard and you may have questions. This resource is to help you understand the health care system in B.C. It includes information on eligibility and enrolment for health care coverage, finding a family doctor or nurse practitioner as well as frequently asked questions related to the health and wellbeing of you and your family.

In B.C., health authorities govern, plan and deliver health-care services within their geographic areas. The Ministry of Health works together with the five regional health authorities and a First Nations health authority to provide high quality, appropriate and timely health services. VCH serves over 1.25 million people including the residents of Vancouver, Richmond, the North Shore and Coast Garibaldi, Sea-to-Sky, Sunshine Coast, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola. To learn more about the communities that VCH serves, [visit the VCH website](#), which is available in multiple languages.

For critical or life threatening conditions:

Call **9-1-1** or go immediately to your [nearest hospital Emergency Department \(ED\)](#) if you or someone requires immediate medical attention for illness, injury or overdose, such as:

- Involvement in a major accident
- Trouble breathing or catching your breath
- Severe abdominal or chest pain/pressure
- Signs of stroke, for example facial droop, arm weakness or slurred speech
- Loss of consciousness
- Uncontrolled bleeding



Accessing health care in B.C.

B.C. offers free health care coverage to all residents. To access health care services, you need to enrol in the Government of British Columbia's health plan known as the Medical Services Plan (MSP). It pays for basic, medically required health services. These include some doctor visits, medical tests and treatments. It is important to note that not all health costs are covered by MSP.

MSP is for:

- B.C. residents who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents
- B.C. residents who are government assisted refugees
- International students with study permits
- Some people with work permits for six months or more

To find out if you are eligible for MSP, [visit the Government of British Columbia website](#).

Registering for MSP

All residents of B.C. must apply and be registered with MSP. You should register for MSP as soon as you arrive in B.C. It may take up to three months for your application to be processed.

If you do not have MSP, you are encouraged to buy private medical insurance. If you need medical care in B.C. and you do not have MSP or private medical insurance, you will have to pay all medical costs yourself.

Supplementary benefits

If your income is low, you may be eligible for supplementary benefits. MSP supplementary benefits will pay part of some medical services. These include:

- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic treatments
- Massage therapy
- Naturopathy
- Physical therapy
- Non-surgical podiatry

You may qualify for supplementary benefits if you have lived in Canada for the last 12 months (one year) as a Canadian citizen or permanent resident. To apply, fill out an application form and send it to Health Insurance BC.

More information is available on [the Government of British Columbia website](#).

Registering for MSP

International student health fee

International students studying in B.C. for six months or more are required to enrol in MSP and pay a monthly health fee.

This fee is for:

- International students in kindergarten to Grade 12
- International post-secondary students with study permits who are enrolled in MSP

More information is available on [the Government of British Columbia website](#).

Get your BC Services Card

In order to access health care services, you will need a BC Services Card.

To get your card, you will need to follow the below steps.



Apply for MSP

1. Complete and send the BC MSP enrolment form. More information is available on [the Government of British Columbia website](#).
2. You can also apply online via [the Government of British Columbia website](#).



Visit an Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) driver licensing office to process a BC Services Card

1. After you send your documents and enrolment form, you will receive a letter in the mail. Take the letter to an ICBC driver licensing office. You will also need to take two pieces of identification.
2. Find out what kind of identification you will need by visiting the [ICBC website](#).
3. Find an [ICBC office near you](#).

Children under 19, people 75 and older, and people with study and work permits do not have to visit an ICBC office. You will receive a BC Services Card without a photo. However, if you would like a BC Services Card with a photo, you may visit an ICBC driver licensing office.

Refugee claimant or protected person

If you came to Canada as a refugee, refugee claimant or protected person, you may be covered by the [Interim Federal Health Program](#). This program provides temporary coverage of basic and supplemental health services such as hospital visits, family physician or nurse practitioner visits, some medications and some vision/dental care.

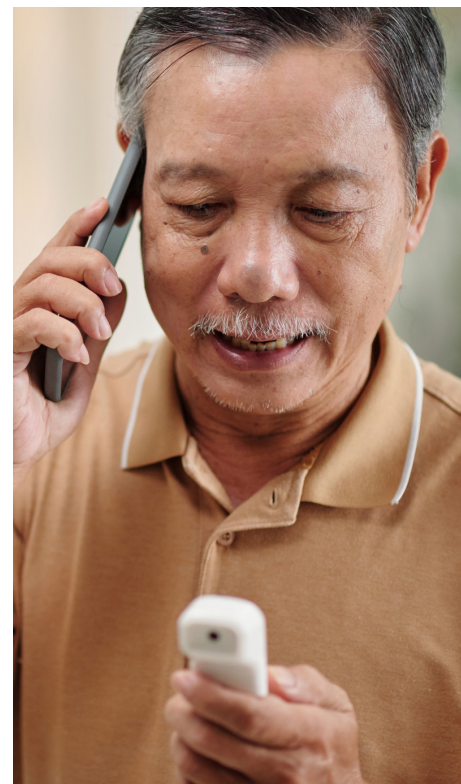
HealthLink BC

If you need non-emergency health information and advice in B.C., HealthLink BC is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by telephone, website, a mobile app and printable information. All of HealthLink BC's services are free.

To access HealthLink BC for non-emergency care, please call **8-1-1**. If you cannot hear, or do not hear very well, call **7-1-1**.

- Speak with a nurse or get help finding services in your community. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Speak with a dietitian about food, healthy eating and nutrition. Available Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Speak with someone about physical activity and exercise. Available Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Speak with a pharmacist about medicines. Available every evening and overnight, from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m.

HealthLink BC also has interpreting services in more than 130 languages. When you call **8-1-1**, say the name of your language (for example, say "Punjabi") and an interpreter will join the call.



VCH Public Health

[VCH Public Health](#) works to improve the health and well-being of residents through preventing disease, promoting health and prolonging life among the population as a whole. Programs delivered at Public Health Units throughout our region include:

- Support for growth and development for children up to six years of age
- Audiology
- Dental
- Vision
- Speech and language pathology
- Immunizations for all ages
- Support for the health and wellness of children in school, from Kindergarten to Grade 12
- Youth clinics

Finding a family doctor or nurse practitioner

Family doctors and nurse practitioners help you look after your everyday health needs on a regular basis.



Here are some suggestions on how to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner in your community:

- [College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC Physician Directory](#)
- [Divisions of Family Practice](#): Choose your local division. Many divisions offer a service to connect patients to a family doctor.
- [HealthLink BC](#): Call 8-1-1 (if you are hearing impaired, call 7-1-1) for a free, 24-hour telephone service, staffed by registered nurses, pharmacists and dietitians. HealthLink BC will work with you to determine if there is a physician attachment service in your community.
- Ask your family or friends to introduce you to their own family doctor or nurse practitioner. Sometimes a doctor or nurse practitioner may take you on as a referral from an existing patient.
- If you are visiting another health care provider, such as a specialist, ask them if they know of any family doctors or nurse practitioners that are accepting patients.
- If you are visiting a walk-in clinic, ask the doctor if they would be willing to take you on as a patient.

Walk-in clinics, Urgent and Primary Care Centres and Virtual Care

If you do not have a care provider yet, or you cannot get an appointment with your care provider, you may be able to go to a walk-in clinic or an Urgent and Primary Care Centre (UPCC).

UPCCs provide patient-centred care by a team of health care providers, including family doctors, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers and clerical staff. They are for people who have an urgent but non-life threatening injury and/or illness, and need to be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner within 12-24 hours. Some examples of injuries/illnesses that may be treated at a UPCC are: sprains and strains, high fever, worsening chronic disease, minor infections, and new or worsening pain. UPCCs provide team-based, everyday health care. They provide urgent care when you are unable to see your family doctor or nurse practitioner and your injury/illness does not require emergency attention.

Call [HealthLink BC](#) at 8-1-1 to find a walk-in clinic or UPCC near you. Some clinics are open until late and many are open seven days a week.

Frequently asked questions

What if I need language assistance at a medical appointment?

- If you need language assistance at a medical appointment, there are interpretation services available for your health care needs. You can ask your doctor, nurse practitioner or midwife to book an interpreter service for you.
- You may also call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 for health information services in languages other than English. Interpreting services are available in over 130 languages. After dialing 8-1-1, you will be connected with an English-speaking health service navigator. To get service in another language, simply state the language you are looking for (for example, say “Punjabi”) and an interpreter will join the call.

How do I call for an ambulance?

- If you have a medical emergency and cannot get to the hospital yourself, you can call an ambulance. In most places, the phone number is 9-1-1. There might be a different phone number in small communities. Check for the number inside the front pages of your telephone book or ask your local police department. You should write down and save emergency numbers.
- When you call the emergency number, the operator will ask if you want police, fire or ambulance. Ask for an ambulance. The operator will ask questions about your health concerns. They may give you medical instructions over the phone. If an ambulance is sent, paramedics will take care of you.
- MSP does not cover the full cost of going to hospital by ambulance. You will have to pay some of the cost. You do not have to pay right away as you will get a bill later. If you have a low income, you may get assistance.

What do I do if my family doctor/nurse practitioner is not available?

- If you are having an urgent issue and your family doctor or nurse practitioner is not available, you can see a doctor or nurse practitioner at a walk-in clinic or go to an Urgent and Primary Care Centre (UPCC).
- A UPCC is not intended to replace family doctors or care providers as a person’s first point of contact for health concerns, nor will it replace Emergency Departments for life-threatening illnesses or injuries. It is intended to be an additional service in the community to provide appropriate urgent services to patients, when and where they need it.
- These are first come, first served, so you may have to wait to see a doctor or nurse practitioner.

How do I know if I should go to the Emergency Department or an Urgent and Primary Care Centre (UPCC)?

- For life-threatening illnesses or injuries, call 9-1-1 or go to the [Emergency Department](#) to be assessed and treated immediately. This includes suspected stroke or heart attack, poisoning or overdose, major trauma, head injury with loss of consciousness, etc.
- UPCCs provide patient-centred care by a team of health care providers, including family doctors, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers and clerical staff. They are for people who have an urgent but non-life threatening injury and/or illness, and need to be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner within 12-24 hours.
- Some examples of injuries/illnesses that may be treated at a UPCC are: sprains and strains, high fever, worsening chronic disease, minor infections, and new or worsening pain. UPCCs provide team-based, everyday health care. They provide urgent care when you are unable to see your family doctor or nurse practitioner and your injury/illness does not require emergency attention.

Frequently asked questions

Where do I go to buy medicine?

- There are some medicines you can buy only if you have a prescription. Prescriptions must be written by a doctor or another medical person (like a midwife or nurse practitioner). You can buy prescription drugs at a pharmacy (drug store). Some grocery stores have pharmacies. When you go to a pharmacy, take your prescription with you. The prescription tells the pharmacist which drug, and how much, you need. The pharmacist will explain how often and for how long you must take the medicine.
- You can search online for a pharmacy, call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or use the [HealthLink BC website](#) or the [BC Health Services Locator app](#) to find a pharmacy near you.
- You can buy some medicines without a prescription. These are called non-prescription or over-the-counter drugs. These are usually for less serious problems, such as a headache, a cold or allergies. If you have a question about over-the-counter drugs, ask the pharmacist. You can also call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a pharmacist.

How do I see a specialist?

- You have to be seen by your family doctor or nurse practitioner for an appointment. If it is needed, then a referral is sent to the specialist by your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

Where do I go if I need vaccinations for any member of my family?

- Immunizations are an important tool in health care, protecting us from the effects of a number of serious and potentially fatal infections and diseases. Get routine immunizations for children and adults at VCH Public Health Units or from a general practitioner. Learn more about [immunizations](#).

If I'm travelling outside of B.C., do I need additional health insurance?

- There is important information you need to know about the extent of coverage while you are out of the province. For the latest information, visit [the Government of British Columbia website](#).

Additional resources

- [Welcome BC](http://www.welcomebc.ca) offers useful information, tools and resources for new residents of B.C.
www.welcomebc.ca
- [211 British Columbia](http://www.bc.211.ca) is a free, confidential, multilingual service that links people to resources for help, where and when they need it.
www.bc.211.ca
- [S.U.C.C.E.S.S.](http://www.successbc.ca) is one of the largest social services agencies in Canada, offering a wide range of programs and services that promote the belonging, wellness and independence of all people on their Canadian journey.
www.successbc.ca
- [MOSAIC](http://www.mosaicbc.org) is one of Canada's largest settlement non-profit organizations, providing newcomer services to immigrants, refugees and individuals from diverse backgrounds in Greater Vancouver and throughout B.C.
www.mosaicbc.org
- [Immigrant Services Society of BC \(ISSofBC\)](http://www.issbc.org) provides a variety of support services for immigrants and refugees to start their new lives in Canada.
www.issbc.org
- [Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC](http://www.anhbc.org) offers programs designed to help newcomers make connections within the community. Services are offered in multiple languages and range from counselling and community events to skill building workshops.
www.anhbc.org
- [The Government of British Columbia](http://www2.gov.bc.ca) offers additional information on the Medical Services Plan (MSP) including eligibility and enrolment.
www2.gov.bc.ca
- [Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre](http://www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca) offers multilingual information on mental health challenges and treatments as well as information about how to find culturally-appropriate mental health services.
www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca



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