



Gabriola Island's Influenza Immunization Campaign Sees Major Success

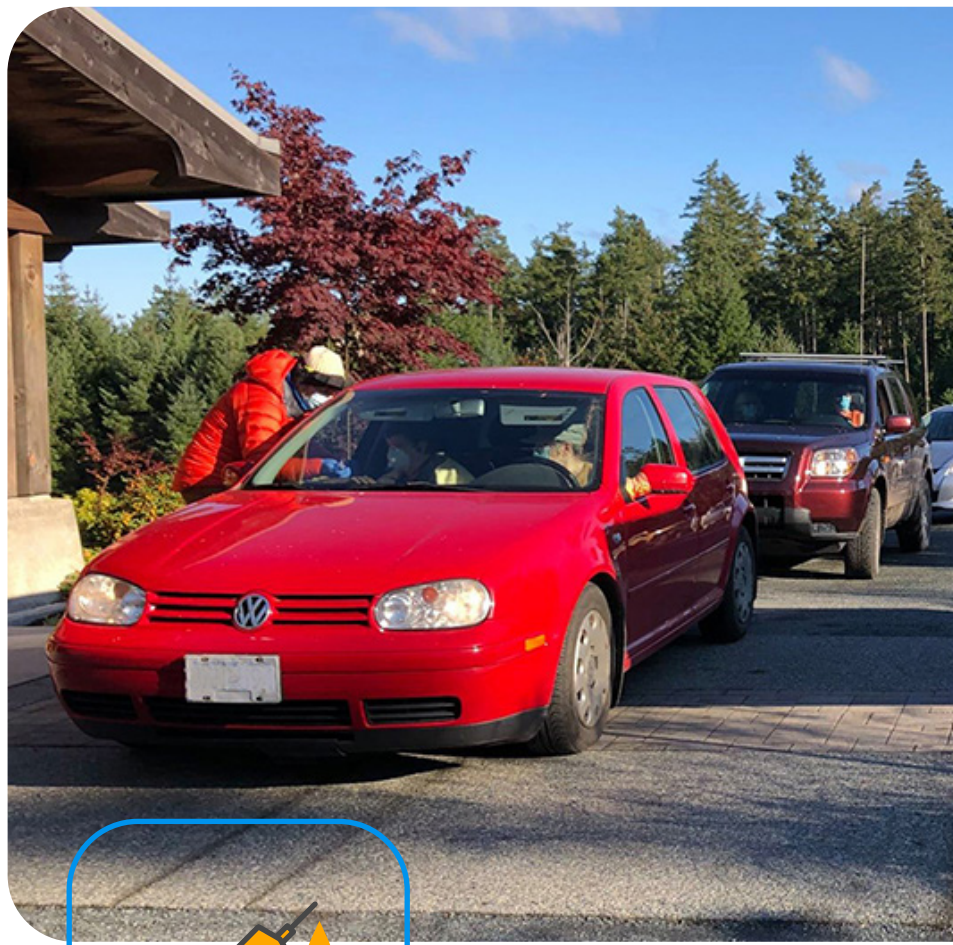
Like communities throughout B.C.,

Gabriola Island has a significant influenza immunization campaign every year. In a typical year, around 600 people on the island get immunized against seasonal influenza. Most residents receive their immunization during dedicated events at the Gabriola Medical Clinic over a few afternoons in the fall.

But the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges. Not only was demand for immunizations much higher than in past years, there was a need to keep everyone safe from exposure to COVID-19.

"Immunizing people who live in rural and remote communities, like Gabriola Island, can be complex," says Dr. Dee Hoyano, medical health officer with Island Health. "Particularly with the precautions needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Dr. Tracey Thorne, one of three family physicians with the Gabriola Medical Clinic recalls, "We couldn't have that many people in our waiting room. We had to figure out how to safely get as many people immunized as possible."



Immunization Drive-Through



The solution was an influenza immunization drive-through. To get a shot, patients would not have to leave the comfort and safety of their car.

Collaborating with public health in Nanaimo, Dr. Thorne's team secured vaccine doses and set a date for the event in late-October. On the close-knit island, a Facebook post and a notice in the local community paper was all that was needed to get the word out about the event.

Prioritizing Vulnerable Populations



With more people wanting to get immunized against influenza during the pandemic, it was important to ensure those most at risk of serious illness were able to receive their shot. That's why the Gabriola Medical Clinic pre-booked 160 frail and elderly people at specified times in the morning to prioritize their immunizations to be administered first.

"Our patients loved it," explains Dr. Thorne. "Our elderly patients especially really appreciated that they felt prioritized."

In the afternoon, the drive through clinic began offering vaccines to other eligible adults on a first come, first served basis. Though the line of cars was long at times, the average wait was only 20 to 30 minutes. In the end, over 700 people were vaccinated for influenza during the clinic, or more than 10% of the island's population.

Another 100 people who couldn't attend the drive-through clinic were able to book an appointment afterwards.

"Best Flu Shot Experience Ever"



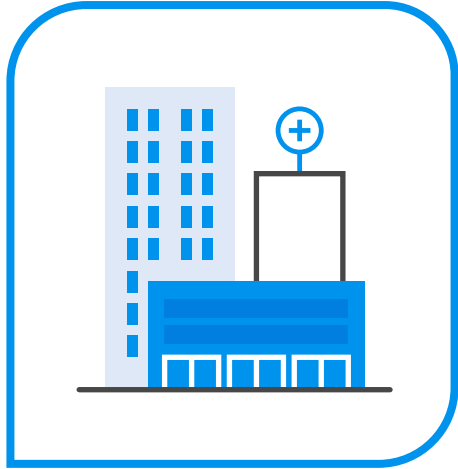
The feedback from the community has been resoundingly positive. Feedback on Facebook from those who attended the clinic included statements such as "easiest flu clinic ever," "very impressed," and "best flu shot experience ever."

The success of the drive-through immunization clinic may even affect future mass vaccination plans on the island.

"Our communities are better protected from influenza when all of our health-care providers who can immunize work together. That is why we were pleased to see the team at the Gabriola Medical Clinic successfully take on this challenge," adds Dr. Hoyano.

Gabriola Medical Clinic

Gabriola Island has a history of great primary health care. The community was selected for the 2018 B.C. Rural Community Award at the B.C. Rural Health Conference for the opening of the Gabriola Health Service Centre. The modern, 8,500 square foot facility built by the community now facilitates family physicians, emergency care and a range of other health services all in one place.



"I love the sense of community here," said Dr. Thorne. "It's really a great group to live and work with."