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COVID-19: Party held on Vancouver beach despite social distancing pleas from health officials

Health officials in B.C. are set to address the spike in coronavirus cases and the lack of social distancing

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Scores of people held a party on Third Beach in Vancouver Tuesday night despite pleas from health officials to maintain social distancing protocols as the number of COVID-19 cases spike in B.C. RYAN SCHAAP/TWITTER

TRENDING

Scores of people held a party on Third Beach in Vancouver on Tuesday night despite pleas from health officials to maintain social-distancing protocols as the number of COVID-19 cases spike in B.C.

“We are concerned about the potential risk to individuals who participated, particularly considering the increase in positive COVID-19 cases over the past week,” said Ulmer in an email Wednesday.

Since mid-March the park board has implemented an awareness campaign and put up signs at public beaches and parks, with the intention of mitigating the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread in public spaces, she added.

Vancouver police spokeswoman Tania Visintin said police haven’t been issuing tickets for non-compliance with social distancing. She said police will focus on public safety, prevention of crimes and upholding the law.

“We will also continue to spread awareness and educate the community on the importance of social distancing,” she said.

The province is still under a state of emergency and health officials have ordered no gatherings of more than 50 people.

B.C. provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry has pleaded with people to continue social distancing as community transmission rates have spiked significantly. There were 102 new confirmed cases of the virus on the weekend and on Tuesday, the province confirmed 30 more.

The worst community outbreak is in Kelowna, where a group of six people from Vancouver, Kelowna and Alberta partied in the Okanagan city over the Canada Day long weekend. There are now 60 cases related to that community exposure, as the group went to several venues including a restaurant, fitness facility and beach.

The median age of British Columbians who are testing positive is 50, but Henry said that number was falling, with more people in their 20s and 30s testing positive.

On Tuesday, Health Minister Adrian Dix said British Columbians will need to make adjustments to their behaviour if a return to Phase 2 is to be avoided, in light of increasing COVID-19 cases.

“What it tells us is — because we know what we can do, because we showed what we can do in March, April, May and in June — that we have to use the tools at our disposal, and they can be used,” said Dix. “Physical distancing is critical to that, and it’s more important I’d argue.”

Dix said British Columbians needed to “recommit ourselves fundamentally to what we’ve learned which has worked.”

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— With files from David Carrigg and Stephanie Ip



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Several videos of Third Beach were posted on Twitter and Instagram showing people dancing and crowding together at the popular drum-circle spot. Most are not wearing masks.

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Came across this huge drum circle that had expanded to block the Seawall pedestrian and bicycle paths. While it is good to see people enjoying themselves, blocking the pathway is not cool. Also it is strange to see so many people out and together as the pandemic has subsided but not entirely disappeared. I just the first time I've seen something like this where a crowd on a weekday it's so big that it impedes the normal Seawall traffic. [#fulltiltlife](#) [#fulltiltward](#) [#outofyourcomfortzone](#)

The Ministry of Health is aware of the incident and has announced it will hold a special news conference today at 3 p.m., likely to address a spike in cases and a lack of social distancing.

It could mean that stricter measures are coming, after B.C.'s health officials hinted earlier this week they may be necessary if people don't follow the guidelines.

Christine Ulmer, a spokeswoman for the Vancouver park board, said the drum circle held Tuesday at Third Beach was an unsanctioned and unpermitted event that is organized regularly by community members without consultation with the board.

The park board doesn't have an ability to enforce any physical-distancing recommendations, as that falls under the purview of the province, she said.