Public Safety

Public Safety was among the issues raised by many participants during the Conversation on Health. Epidemics and infectious diseases, public safety, and hygiene and public awareness were highlighted in many discussions and submissions. Here is a selection of what British Columbians had to say on the subject of public safety.

Epidemics and Infectious Diseases

In general, participants expressed concern about the possibility that disease will spread and cause an epidemic. They pointed to overcrowding, poor availability of testing and immunization, and increased environmental sensitivities among the public as potential factors that may contribute to an outbreak of SARS, avian bird flu or other illnesses.

Discussion focused on increasing services and regulations as a way to protect British Columbians from a future pandemic. Some believe vaccination programs should be free to the public, while others believe that Canada should be more careful about letting foreign products into the country. Other options for preventing epidemics include testing for more diseases to identify illness early and avoid serious consequences, developing a comprehensive strategy to avoid cross-contamination, and preventing people with communicable diseases from travelling.

Make free immunization programs available to all. With global warming it will be easier for tropical diseases to survive in our climate so travellers should have to have their immunization current when leaving the country so diseases are not brought back to Canada.

– Email, Victoria

Hygiene and Public Awareness of Disease

There was general consensus that public awareness of hygiene was not good. Some participants believed that sanitation in public areas, such as restaurants and retail stores, should be higher and that unclean and crowded conditions in health care facilities contribute to the spread of disease.
Some submissions to the Conversation on Health pointed to education as the key to preventing the spread of disease. Improved awareness about the benefits of hand-washing, both for the public and for health professionals, is important. Education programs and publicity campaigns for specific diseases like sexually-transmitted diseases and tuberculosis also received significant attention.

_I’m concerned about avoiding a future pandemic, Avian Influenza or otherwise. It seems the cheapest strategy is to refresh health first-responders that soap kills flu germs._

- Email

Public Safety

Many participants feel that public safety was also not adequate. They think that traffic accidents and unsanitary accommodation risk public health and that few rules exist to protect the public from accidents.

Generally, participants agree that more comprehensive regulation and supervision would increase public safety. While some feel that a safe and clean home should be a legally enforceable right, others believe that more rules and a greater police presence would reduce traffic accidents and, therefore, reduce pressure on emergency rooms. They also think laws to reduce the chance of falls, improve crosswalks, and make seatbelts compulsory in all vehicles should be put in place.

Conclusion

Public safety encouraged strong opinions throughout the Conversation on Health. Participants emphasize that the population needs to be safer and more hygienic to protect against infectious diseases and accidents. Overall, they suggest that better publicity and education around disease management would aid early detection and prevent a potential outbreak, while more stringent rules would promote greater public safety on the road and at home. Though the message about the public’s need for better safety and sanitation is clear, the ideas for achieving this goal are varied and will continue to be debated.
Public Safety

This chapter includes the following topics:

Epidemics, Infectious Diseases and Hygiene
Public Safety
Administration

Related Electronic Written Submissions

Do Not Harm
Submitted by the AD-AV Society

Related Chapters
Many of the topics discussed by participants in the Conversation on Health overlap; additional feedback related to this theme may be found in other chapters including: Patient Safety; Public Private Debate; Training; Morale; Access and Chronic Disease Management.

Epidemics, Infectious Diseases and Hygiene

Comments and Concerns

• The spread of drug resistant bacteria can be rampant.
• Pets transmit illness and parasites and belong outside.
• Upholstery is a source of disease.
• Remove the magazines from hospitals as they increase the spread of germs and disease.
• It is inappropriate for long-term care facilities to keep live birds as pets as they carry diseases which put the elderly population at risk.
• Aircrafts could be a major source of the spreading of diseases.
• Flu shots cannot be obtained in Cranbrook.
• Since society is dealing with many new environmental illnesses, any illness that cannot be explained by normal testing must be taken more seriously.

• Many young professionals have not witnessed major disease outbreaks and as a result do not see as much need for vaccines.

• A future epidemic could have an impact on young people and be detrimental to the workforce, especially hospital workers.

• Since privatization has come into health care, our hospitals are not being properly or thoroughly cleaned and superbugs have proliferated. Where is the accountability?

• I am disgusted at the disorder in the hospitals. The hallways are cluttered with gurneys, blood equipment, wheelchairs, boxes, bedding and other stuff that makes cleaning very difficult. The washrooms and toilets are disgusting by anyone’s standards. The consequences could very well include the spread of diseases such as SARS and other viruses.

• The public and patients are not informed that they are carriers of infectious diseases.

• Overcrowding in hospitals enhances the spread of infections.

• The 2006 pneumonia outbreak in the Downtown Eastside resulted from overcrowded emergency rooms.

• Mixing sick and injured patients in offices and hospitals often leads to infection of otherwise healthy, injured individuals, which costs them personal grief, money, time for treatment, and a loss of productivity to society.

• There needs to be a better understanding of the systemic impacts of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus (MRSA).

• Health Canada failed to inform the public that antibiotic misuse can cause immune dysfunction.

• Superbug infections, illness and death are often caused from taking unnecessary antibiotic treatment.

• A commercial was done on the use of antibiotics with kids telling us not to take antibiotics for the flu.

• Canada does not acknowledge that Lyme disease is a problem; the test needed to properly diagnose Lyme disease is not available in Canada.

• Radon as a cause of lung cancer is not adequately publicized.

• X-rays are a health danger. The radiation is lifetime accumulated. No records are kept about how much, how often and when patients get X-rays during their life.

• Why is Health Canada warning people not to take colloidal silver?
The Department of Microbiology at the University of British Columbia is working on helping us to be better prepared the next time a pandemic hits. One of its projects focuses on new means to battle infectious disease pathogens with significant public health implications, such as food-borne Salmonella and E.coli.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

- Refresh the knowledge of first-responders and remind them that soap kills flu germs.
- Implement hand washing education.
- Educate doctors not to prescribe antibiotics when they are unnecessary.
- Retail owners need to keep up hygiene standards.
- Restaurants should maintain good personal hygiene standards since disease can be transmitted very easily.
- Have humidifiers in our houses to cut down on flu transmission.
- Canada should take more time to check the products coming into the country.
- There should be hospitals specifically set up to address epidemics.
- Separate people with infectious illness from other patients; divide the emergency area in two and station a person at the entry to direct patients to the proper area.
- There should be more information and education about the benefits and drawbacks of vaccines.
- Provide public reports about the effectiveness of mass vaccinations for influenza.
- We need more sites set up to distribute flu shots.
- Make immunization programs available to all and encourage people to keep their immunizations up-to-date.
- There are vaccinations for girls that can prevent cervical cancer, which could be added to the group of vaccines that are given to all children in school.
- There should be some type of medicine travellers or visitors can take before they enter the country so they do not pass on an infectious disease such as the Avian flu.
- Travellers should be required to have their immunizations current before leaving the country so diseases are not brought back to Canada.
- There should be more education on sexually transmitted infections.
- Increase access to Lyme disease testing.
• Publicize tuberculosis particularly at bus stops and on the downtown streets.

• Encourage persons to stay home when ill to prevent the spread of contagious illness.

**Outstanding Questions**

• Could the public health system cope with a SARS-like outbreak?

• Are change rooms available for health professionals to change out of their scrubs before leaving for home?

**Public Safety**

**Comments and Concerns**

• The new regulations restricting commercial drivers’ licenses for those with diabetes are unfair, discriminatory and unnecessary.

• Illegal drugs on the market contain more chemical substances.

• The public uses cell phones too much; they are dangerous to use without a headset.

• Aerosol-pressured dilators caused 1,700 deaths in one year in the United Kingdom.

• Life-threatening allergies are on the rise, yet there is not a lot of public awareness.

• Bed bugs are a significant health hazard.

• Too many people live in unsafe houses and apartments; these places should be condemned by the law.

• Road accidents kill more young Canadians than any other cause and a high percentage of health care costs are caused by vehicle crashes.

• Falls are a leading cause of death and unintentional injury-related hospitalizations.

• A woman called 911 because she was being threatened and by the time the police arrived she had been severely beaten.
Ideas and Suggestions

- Have a standard test for bus and truck drivers to ensure they are not operating such machinery under the influence of any drugs.
- Develop more stringent rules for the roads and add more police. This will result in less congestion in the hospitals due to accidents.
- Look at highways and road maintenance and design with the goal of reducing road-related health care costs.
- Advertise Electronic Stability Control systems for vehicles to help reduce accidents and have the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia advertise them in insurance renewal notices and offer insurance premium discounts for its use.
- Make the Malahat highway safer.
- Provide stronger sentencing for violent offenders to keep them off the streets so that innocent people do not end up in hospitals.
- Make hanging laundry out in public illegal.
- Clothes in a second-hand store should be fumigated before being sold.
- There should be a provincial policy in schools for children with allergies which would provide a universal standard of care for this important health issue.
- Schools need supervision to ensure that quality food is provided.
- Hockey helmets should be banned and the sport reverted back to a game of fun rather than a sport with a kill-em attitude.
- Legislation should be in place for bar owners or concert promoters to provide hearing protection to patrons if the music is played over a certain decibel level.
- Crosswalks should be designed to maximize accessibility in order to cut down on jay-walking accidents.
- Create legislation for fall prevention accountability (due to ice and snow) and to make seatbelts compulsory in all vehicle including buses.
- There should be stricter regulations and safety inspections on imports, particularly toys.
- There should be warning labels on products such as sunscreen, so that people with environmental sensitivities do not use them.
- Make a clean, safe and bedbug-free home a legally enforceable right.
- Ban guns in British Columbia.
Administration

Comments and Concerns

- The government did not provide adequate assistance during the boil water advisories; bottled water should have been available for the public.
- Discharging patients too early results in a high infection rate for disease.
- Funding cutbacks have resulted in unclean hospitals.
- Lifting bans on chemical products would result in unsafe products being available to the public.

Ideas and Suggestions

- Develop a comprehensive plan to address cross-contamination.
- The government should have a plan to provide medical care to citizens in case of a bird flu pandemic.
- Appoint a panel of experts to review and recommend changes to British Columbia’s infectious disease policies.
- Institute measures to counter the spread of new virulent strains of tuberculosis.
- The Provincial Emergency Program would be good training for the public.
- People who have serious communicable diseases should not be allowed to travel on public transport (buses and planes).
- People who are aware they are carrying life-threatening diseases and continue to infect others should face criminal charges.