

Hate During the COVID-19 Pandemic

PRESENTATION TO BC'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER

DR. BONNIE HENRY, PROVINCIAL HEALTH OFFICER | APRIL 2022

Land Acknowledgement

Recognizing with deep gratitude the lands of the ləkʷəŋən People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, and the other traditional territories upon which others are joining this morning

Presentation Outline

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Public Health Measures

- ▶ Orders of the Provincial Health Officer are used under the authority of the *Public Health Act* and are **temporary** measures to implement restrictions or limitations to **protect the health of the population** during a public health emergency
- ▶ Each Order includes a preamble that explains the **rationale** for the restrictions or limitations in the context of evidence, science, local context, alignment with requirements under the *Charter* and Human Rights Code, and further explanations of a balanced approach to reduce societal disruption/inequity while protecting public health
- ▶ The *Public Health Act* has been utilized over 150 times since March 2020 to support these Orders, notices, and declarations

Public Health Measures

- ▶ Multiple measures were implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19 and preserve health care system resources
- ▶ Measures have been successful in limiting the spread of COVID-19, but have had societal consequences, including an increase in hate-filled messaging

Quantifying Hate Messages

- ▶ **Over 200 emails** received by the Office of the Provincial Health Officer were threatening enough to have to report them to the risk/threat assessment team, and in many cases, law enforcement for further investigation and action
- ▶ **Over 100 used masks** have been sent into the Office
- ▶ Multiple **troubling packages** of mixed media / mediums received
- ▶ Between **10 and 50 abusive/threatening phone** calls are managed **daily**
- ▶ **Between 1 and 7 abusive/threatening voicemails** are received **weekly**

Reports on Societal Consequences

- ▶ Collaboration between Office of the Provincial Health Officer and BC Centre for Disease Control to examine the positive and negative societal consequences of the pandemic
- ▶ Two reports relate directly to hate:
 - ▶ **Gender-based violence**
 - ▶ **Anti-Asian racism**

Gender-Based Violence: Key Findings

- ▶ Response measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 have:
 - ▶ **increased** the risk of gender-based violence in BC
 - ▶ **reduced** accessibility of related support services and the ability of survivors to seek needed supports
 - ▶ **facilitated** and **reinforced** perpetrators' control and abuse
- ▶ BC support services providers reported **significant increases in demand** and faced **additional challenges**: pivoting how services were delivered, maintaining adequate staffing, and managing physical spaces to uphold public health measures

GBV: Considerations for Future Action

Address	Address the known data challenges in acquiring timely, accurate, reflective data for GBV in BC and across Canada.
Integrate	Integrate efforts to assess and respond to GBV in BC, across all ministries and partners, to ensure the most coordinated, efficient and effective response for optimal outcomes for survivors and their children.
Implement	Implement province-wide violence prevention initiatives that increase awareness and understanding of GBV as an issue and highlight attention to perpetrator prevention rather than victim prevention.
Increase	Increase communication and awareness of GBV and its impacts across all ministries with all pandemic-related activities, and actively work to implement a GBA+ and trauma- and violence-informed cared lens in all COVID-19 response efforts.
Support	Support public health and other interdisciplinary programs that focus on the impacts of GBV, including Adverse Childhood Events of children when they witness GBV and other forms of violence.
Strengthen	Strengthen primary care professionals' clinical skills of recognizing and asking clients about Adverse Childhood Events and their impacts

Anti-Asian Racism, Stigma, and Discrimination

- ▶ Targeted anti-Asian racism and discriminatory acts have **increased in frequency and severity** throughout communities in BC and across Canada during COVID-19.
- ▶ Types of incidents from police data and other public sources include:
 - ▶ racist graffiti and social media messaging,
 - ▶ being called names or insulted, and
 - ▶ being threatened, intimidated and assaulted.

REPORTED:
JUL/15/21

Anti-Asian Racism, Stigma, and Discrimination

EXAMINING THE SOCIETAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Key Findings:

- Targeted anti-Asian racism and discriminatory acts have increased in frequency and severity throughout communities in BC and across Canada during COVID-19.

Situation

There has been an increase in racism and intolerance in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic, directed against Chinese populations and people perceived to be of Asian descent.

Background

Anti-Asian racism and biases are not new in the BC and Canadian context. Past instances include explicit historical federal policies discriminating against Chinese communities (e.g., Chinese Head Tax (1885), Chinese Exclusion Act (1923-1947));¹ historical denial of voting rights for those of Asian descent (1855, 1920);² targeted attacks on Japanese and Chinese communities organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League during the Vancouver Anti-Asian Riots (1907);^{3,4,5,6} racialization of drug laws in Canada specifically targeting Chinese individuals (1820s);^{7,8} and incarcerating Japanese Canadians during the Second World War (1942).⁹ More recently, this includes racialized discrimination targeting Chinese and Asian communities during the SARS outbreak in 2003.¹⁰


While interpersonal and systemic racism persists in BC overall, specific drivers of racism towards Chinese and Asian populations during the COVID-19 pandemic have included:

- The origin/first documentation of the virus in the city of Wuhan, China;
- Stigmatizing and incorrect language used when speaking about COVID-19;¹¹ and
- Initial international travel restrictions by several countries limiting travel specifically from China.¹²


Numerous reports and publications have identified a need to reduce barriers to accessing culturally safe and appropriate care during COVID-19, including safe spaces, respectful interactions and access to translated materials.^{13,14,15,16}

Indigenous Peoples and Reconciliation

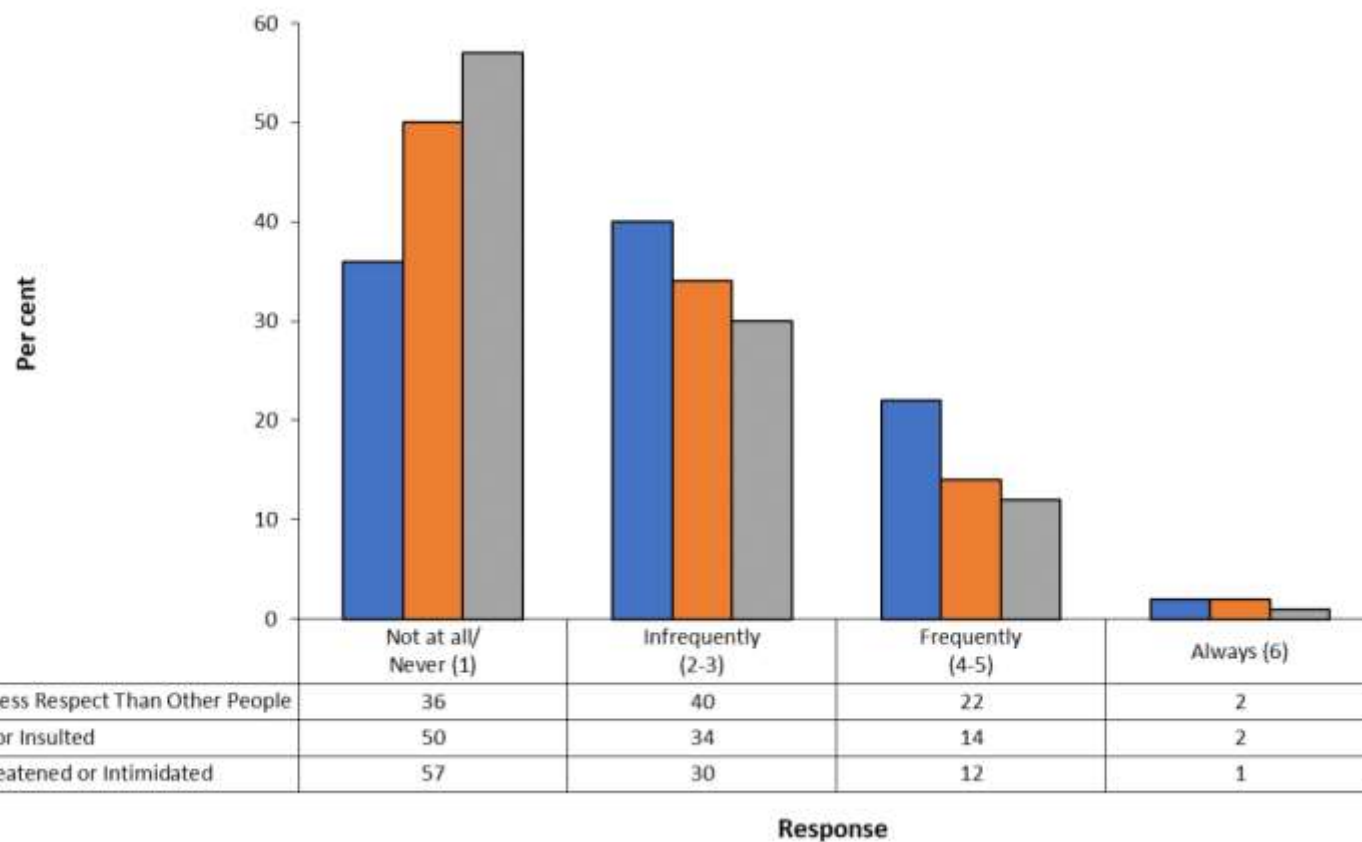
While this report specifically focuses on the racism and discrimination faced by Asian people during COVID-19, the impact of structural and interpersonal racism, ongoing discrimination and related stigma on Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) Peoples during COVID-19 is also a serious issue. The pervasiveness of anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination in BC's healthcare system are well described in the *It's About Time* report. The report also details concrete actions that are required to arrest racism and its associated harms.



BC Health Services



Office of the Provincial Health Officer



Chinese Canadians' Experience of Racism in the Past Three Months, Canada, June 2020

COVID-19 SPEAK Survey

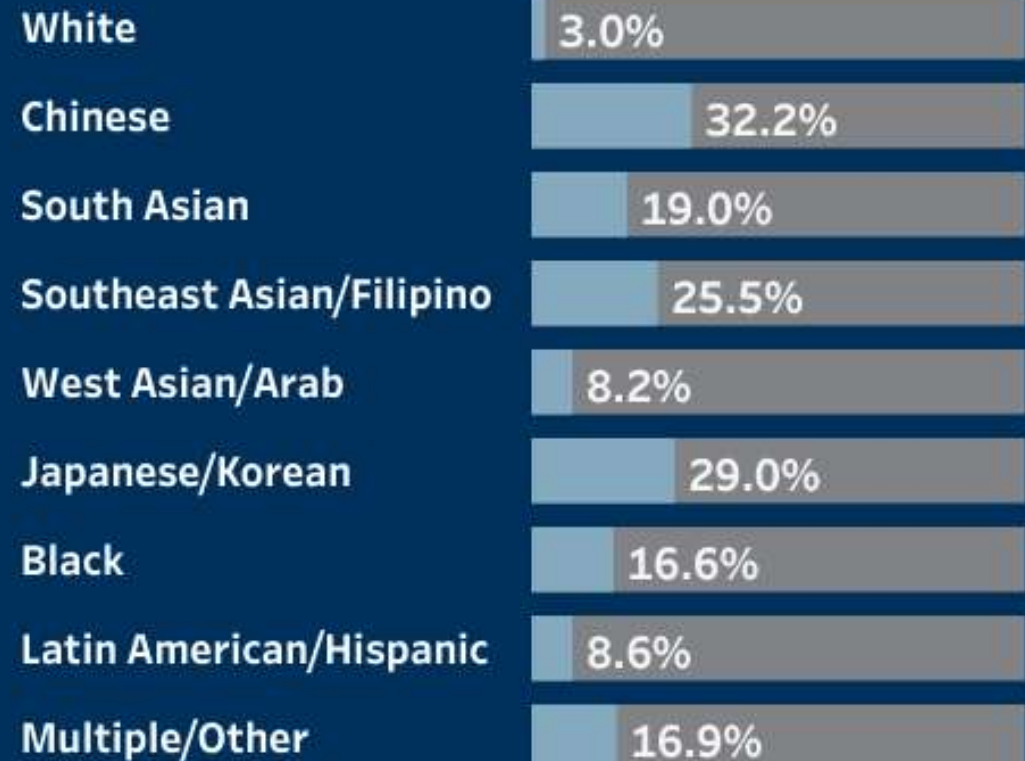
- ▶ BC COVID-19 Survey on Population Experiences, Action and Knowledge (SPEAK) is an annual survey that asked British Columbia residents to share their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ The second round of this survey, conducted in April and May 2021, provides additional data on experiences of racial discrimination since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 SPEAK 2 Results

- ▶ In BC, 9.6% said they have experienced increased discrimination, been treated unfairly or with less respect since the COVID-19 pandemic because of their ethnicity, nationality, race, or skin colour.



Ethnicity Group



Anti-Asian Racism: Considerations for Future Action

- ▶ **Actively address racist, discriminatory acts**, including creating effective strategies for non-visible minorities to be allies to those impacted.
- ▶ **Ensure that easily accessible, understandable, and culturally relevant supports—including translated materials—are widely distributed.** This is especially important to address concerns (e.g., vaccine hesitancy, safety) and misinformation.
- ▶ **Increase availability of culturally safe, relevant, and appropriate health services.** This includes appropriate and safe treatment in all health settings and increased mental health support to assist those affected by racism and discrimination.
- ▶ **Enhance anti-discriminatory and intolerance-related content in educational curriculum** at all levels of schooling, including secondary and post-secondary settings.

Streams of Hate

- ▶ Directed at the Provincial Health Officer individually
- ▶ Directed at the Office of the Provincial Health Officer as a whole
- ▶ Directed at members of the Office
- ▶ Directed at public health measures / Orders
- ▶ Directed at specific populations who received priority vaccination or other priority resources (e.g., Corrections, residents of the DTES, people who use drugs, Temporary Foreign Workers, Indigenous peoples)
- ▶ Directed at government / Minister(s) / Premier / Prime Minister

Mediums of Hate

Email

- Image
- Text
- Links
- Video clips

Phone

- Disturbing threats, rants
- Bomb threats

Mail / Packages

- Boxes
- CDs,
- Bibles
- Feces
- Used masks

Fax

- Text
- Images

In Person

- Public protests
- Graffiti
- Posters
- People approaching in the street/verbally assaulting in public/protesting at Dr. Henry's house



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Themes and Direct Threats

- ▶ Veiled, conditional, and direct threats to personal safety
- ▶ Common themes found include: Nazi Germany and Nuremberg Codes, conspiracies, religion, Satan/evil, genocide, witchcraft, communism, cults, crimes against humanity, lies, murder, treason, Charter infringements, Illuminati, "Big Pharma", corruption, bribes, "Fake News", homophobia, racism, court threats, rape, rambling, suicide, resignation requests, terrorism, QAnon, stigma towards Indigenous peoples and people who use drugs and/or are street entrenched
- ▶ Threats of being hung, raped, shot, stabbed, executed, home invaded/surrounded
- ▶ Threats to family members, friends, colleagues
- ▶ Based on misinformation, misunderstanding, mistrust of government/ science/physicians, rage against restrictions

Content Warning

- ▶ The following slides contain graphic and disturbing messages sent to the Provincial Health Officer, including direct threats of violence and sexual assault. We feel it is important to share the reality of the messages targeting the Public Health Officer, but we encourage viewers to be aware of the contents of these slides before engaging with the material.
- ▶ We recognize this information will be deeply disturbing for many people in our province. These issues, while critical to examine, are extremely challenging, especially for people who have experienced or witnessed hate incidents. Anyone who experiences distress or who needs immediate help can access a list of crisis lines and emergency mental health supports we have compiled on our website at: hateinquiry.bchumanrights.ca/support

Jokes on you bitch. Never fucking getting your trash vaccine now. The fuck is the point, you cunts are just going to to keep the gay fucking restrictions on anyways. Taking my mask, throwing it right IN THE GARBAGE. If I have to wear a mask, I will put tiny holes in the mask. So I can still spread covid on a daaaaaaaailllllyyyyy. Covid for all, covid is our god, we worship the covid. Death to all elderly people and vulnerable, and minority's. Blood is on your hands Bonnie.

Bonny I have to tell you I hope you get cancer like John 🙏 only I'm hoping it takes you out.

I can honestly say you are a piece of shit and you really don't care about anyone's fucking well being, kinda looks like you do not want anyone to feel any sort of fucking joy so fuck you, you flaming cunt.

Henry I hope you die a slow horrible death you fucking cunt. I hope your family is ran over by a logging truck. I truly hope some person terminates you. Your worse than the fucking German nazi camps.

I can't wait for your name to get dragged through shit for the stuff you are pulling. Your family will not be able to live in Canada after this. I ever see you I'm going to spit in your face you dumb bitch.

Fuck you bitch rot in a festering foul putrid pit of fermented semen and cat piss you should eat shit for participating in this communist takeover of MY FREE COUNTRY OF CANADA YOU AND YOUR ENTIRE BLOODLINE SHOULD BE ERASED FROM EXISTSTENCE YOU WILL BE MURDERED IN COLD BLOOD BITCH!

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FUCK YOU YOU STUPID CUNT!! Someone should fucking kill you you dumb bitch!!!

I AM PERSONALLY GOING TO PUT A LEAD SLUG IN YOUR HEAD!

TRUST ME YOU CUNT. ALL THESE BUSINESSES GOING UNDER BECAUSE OF YOU !!! ALL THE VACCINE DEATHS BECAUSE OF YOU. ALL THE SUICIDES . YOUVE RUINED BC AND YOU DONT WEAR A FUCKING MASK WHAT YOUVE DONE TO THIS PROVINCE YOU FUCKING CUNT

IF I EVER GET MY HANDS ON YOU, IM GOING TO BEAT YOUR FUCKING FACE IN. SLIT YOUR THROAT BITCH IAND THATS A PROMISE.

Bonnie henry is a stupid cunt and she should be hung from a fuckin rope on the highest and so should the rest of u peices of fucking shit. Go fuck YOURSELFS and tell bonnie to go fuckin kill herself thank you ..

FREEDOM OF SPEECH FUCKIN GOOFYS I HATE BRITISH COLUMBIA BECAUSE OF THAT MAGGOT CUNT TYRANNICAL MUSHROOM CUT STINKING PUSSY BITCH BONNIE HENRY AND I HOPE HE AND HER WBOLE FAMILY DIES A HORRIBLE DEATH IN A FREAK XAR ACCIDENT FUCKIN CUNT👍👍👍

Just so you know, there are many of us that know you are a traitor, and a criminal and we know why you are doing this and it has nothing to do with a fucking cold virus. Im hoping, after this is all over and your new world order is a pipe dream that I get to see you hanging for treason right beside that pedophile piece of shit in Ottawa... by the way, nice red shoes, you satanist cunt.

Impacts of Hate

- ▶ Removal of contact / identifying information online for all staff members
- ▶ Fear surrounding mail received; mail was redirected to Legislature for screening after feces and other troubling packages received
- ▶ Staff not wanting to be photographed with Dr. Henry for fear of being recognized / identified
- ▶ Staff not wanting to disclose where they work to others
- ▶ RCMP detail / security team for Dr. Henry / personal mail packages rerouted to Legislature
- ▶ Stress and exhaustion, fear of going into the office
- ▶ Evacuations

Examples of Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

- ▶ “The Chief spoke to a surge in tension and racism in the settler town that is adjacent to their community. He described how the Freedom Convoy seemed to represent white supremacy and racism, and in turn it made community members more fearful for their safety.”
- ▶ First Nations peoples were prevented access to services businesses purely based on race (Cowichan Tribes / Duncan)
- ▶ Urgent dental care services were not provided due to the patient's address being on-reserve
- ▶ Surge and swells in undercurrent of racism and hate

Employee Experiences

- ▶ Stress related to managing staff who have to open and read these messages
- ▶ Learning of this number of hateful people has impacted trust and concern for others

“[The messages] made me wary and fearful of people on the street, any protestors or anti-maskers who I worry may get violent with me. [I] didn't feel safe and started to stay in more. [I] found myself constantly tired and moody for long stretches because of the stress of the times these communications were incoming all day every day.”

Employee Experiences

“[I] didn’t feel productive or like I could focus on much else on days when they would be flooding in (which was often). This would extend to my nights off after work where I would feel listless remembering the targeted, hateful comments I’d heard throughout the day and anticipating more the next day.

Before this I was able to live in a bit of ignorance about people like this but the sheer vitriol was overwhelming, with all except a handful of the communications we received being the angriest I’ve ever heard directed at me/my team.”

Employee Experiences

“Just recently, our office received a bomb threat. I have heard of these types of threats happening on the news, or in movies, but never thought I would be on the receiving end of one.

The feelings of being unsafe, scared, and sad hit me like a ton of bricks.

In life, we will never be able to please everyone. Everyone has a right to their own opinion, but the levels that people have gone to to show how they feel is unnecessary and heartbreaking.”

Recommendations for Staff Support

- ▶ Make sure that senior leaders meet with staff, understand their concerns, and acknowledge the stress caused.
- ▶ Provide access to external counseling.
- ▶ Put in place safety measures that address staff concerns.



Thank
You