Coronavirus – Update #17
March 22, 2020

To all staff and physicians

Current situation
Today, March 22, Nova Scotia declared a provincial state of emergency to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Nova Scotians are being directed to observe social distancing of two metres (six feet). Nova Scotia borders will tighten to travellers and all entry points will be closely managed. Nova Scotians should only leave if essential. Anyone entering the province will be stopped, questioned and told to self-isolate for 14 days.

Healthy health care workers including physicians are exempt from the cross boarder travel restriction, as are Nova Scotians entering or exiting the province for specialized medical treatment.

Health care providers are exempt from the social distancing requirement of two metres and the gathering limit of no more than five people when in the workplace. This includes:
  • Nova Scotia Health Authority employees
  • IWK Health Centre employees
  • Physicians and nurse practitioners
  • DHW-funded home support agencies and VON
  • Nursing homes
  • Residential care facilities

For more information about what this means for you and your family read the full release here.

As of today, Nova Scotia has 28 positive cases of COVID-19 in people ranging in age from late-teens to mid-70s. Two cases are hospitalized. All are travel-related or connected to an earlier case. There have been 2088 negative test results. Testing numbers are updated daily at https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus.

Our response
COVID-19 testing
The QEII Health Sciences Centre's Microbiology Lab is now certified to report positive and negative tests for COVID-19. Tests no longer have to be sent to the National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg.

Delivery for testing to the regional laboratory should occur within four hours from time of collection. If transportation is delayed beyond four hours, the specimens should be refrigerated and transported to the laboratory using a cooler with ice packs. Transport logistics needs to be maximized to ensure that specimens are received by the QEII laboratory within 24 hours.

Reminder: swab caps must be tightened to prevent leakage and requisitions placed in outside pocket of sample bag.

**Clinical guidelines**

Our teams are working to review and revise clinical instructions, practice guidelines, order sets and care pathways to reflect new provincial screening protocols and guidelines. Updates will be posted on our [COVID-19 website](#) as soon as they are available.

Regional-IWK COVID Care and Transfer Guidelines for [Management of pediatrics COVID patients in NS](#) have been posted.

**Visitor restrictions explained for staff, and patients and families**

[Guidelines](#) have been developed to assist staff in explaining the visitor restrictions that are in place during COVID-19; and new information is available to [share with patients and families](#).

**Continuing Care**

**Long-term care placement variance**

A hospital variance was instituted on March 16 and remains in place indefinitely across the province. Placements to long-term care are now limited to:

- Patients from hospital (with a focus on regional sites),
- Adult Protection placements, and
- Urgent placements from community (i.e. community variances)

**Home support**

NSHA has been working with home support agency representatives to develop a consistent approach to prioritizing home support services during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Home Support Prioritization Protocols](#) and a [Home Support Emergency Response Level (ERL) Guide](#) are now available and are being implemented. This will mean changes to service levels for some individuals.

**Respite care**

Effective March 23, admissions to respite beds will be cancelled until June 30, 2020. New bookings for respite beds on July 1 or later will not be accepted until further notice. We recognize the impact this change will have on individuals and families needing respite. Our staff will continue to work with affected clients and their families to explore any and all supports available to them within their communities.

**Privacy of patients during COVID-19**

The privacy of our patients remains a top priority for NSHA. Any information gained from your employment with NSHA is only to be used in the course of performing your duties.
You may not share any information about a community member attending a facility outside of NSHA. Even sharing within NSHA outside of the course of your daily duties would be considered a privacy breach.

Any reports of information being shared inappropriately will be investigated by the Privacy Officer in your zone. Breach of patient confidentiality is a serious matter and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment if it is determined that the breach was committed with intent to gossip or another malicious purpose. If you have questions about what may or may not be shared during the COVID-19 Pandemic please reach out to the Privacy Office at Privacy@nshealth.ca.

**Telephones for inpatients**
In recognition of the impact visitor restrictions may have on patients, telephones in inpatient rooms have been turned on for patients to use free of charge.

**Hearts for health care**
To the thousands of health care providers and staff across the province who continue to stand up and show up in the most critical times, thank you. Despite the uncertainty many of us may be feeling, we know no matter the challenge, our teams are working hard to take care of Nova Scotians every day. We’ve been hearing some truly positive and up-lifting stories these past weeks, and we wanted to take this opportunity to share some of them with you. From NSHA and everyone across the province, thank you for all that you do.

President and CEO Dr. Brendan Carr delivered a thank you message to staff, and announced that parking will now be available free of charge at Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) hospitals. Management is working on a reimbursement process for staff and physicians currently paying for parking. Updated communications will follow in the coming days.

Some appreciative citizens left this chalk message for staff at the entrance to Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre’s emergency department in Amherst.
I want to say thank you to all the teams in health care right now. I can't even imagine what you are dealing with, normal is crazy enough but now this? Wishing you all the best, good job everyone! – Facebook user

I salute you front liners 👍👍👍 stay safe🙏 – Facebook user

People Services/Human Resources: Employee and Family supports and updated Q&As
The organization is here to support you and, as we move forward, we are committed to responding to the needs of staff. We will work to source resources that meet the evolving needs of our teams in a timely manner, and communicate these resources as soon as they are available.

Being resilient in these challenging times is necessary for everyone. Talent and Organizational Development has brought together a number of resilience resources for you and your colleagues. Additionally, you can find upcoming events, activities and resources here.

Additional COVID-19 questions and answers for employees can be viewed here.

COVID OHSW messages for staff
We've updated our COVID-19 occupational health, safety and wellness messages for staff. Please review here.

Mental Health and Addictions
This is an anxious and stressful time for everyone. It's important to take time for your mental health. Learn more about the many things you can do to help cope with COVID-19.

The Mental Health Provincial Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to anyone experiencing a mental health or addictions crisis or someone concerned about them, by calling 1-888-429-8167 (toll free).

COVID-19 results available in provincial SHARE
As of March 20, COVID-19 results for patients across the province will be available for reference within the patient record in the SHARE system. As well, results are being sent to the primary care provider, if there is one available. Public Health is responsible for the follow up on all COVID-19 results.

Reminder: DIS and SHARE Access Process
With more health care providers treating patients remotely as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic and the need for paperless prescriptions and access to drug profiles, this is a reminder that all user access requests to SHARE and the Drug Information System (DIS) must be submitted through IT Self-Service. This will help users and SHARE coordinators avoid delays due to incomplete forms being submitted. Please note that paper-based forms will no longer be accepted and will be returned to requestors, advising them to re-submit the request using IT Self-Service. We thank you for your support and if you have any questions, please contact your SHARE coordinator or SHARE@novascotia.ca or your local IT Service Desk.

Additional information
As a reminder, staff and physicians can engage a trained interpreter via Language Services to support patients and clients who do not speak English fluently or understand it fully. Visit
Language Services for tools and information that will help you determine when and how to access an interpreter.

For up-to-date information, please visit NSHA’s coronavirus intranet page.

Questions can be directed to coronavirus@nshealth.ca.