2019 Novel Coronavirus – Update #19

Current situation
As of today, March 24, Nova Scotia has 51 positive cases of COVID-19 in people ranging in age from under 10 to mid-70s. One case remains hospitalized. All are travel-related or connected to an earlier case. Read the news release [here](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus). There have been 2,474 negative test results. Testing numbers are updated daily at [https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus).

Special bulletin from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health
On March 24, the province’s Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a special bulletin for health care providers. Highlights include: patient screening, testing, office based infection prevention and control (including social distancing) and an intake/ triage screening tool. [Read full bulletin](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus).

Our response
NSHA operational update
On March 24, NSHA released its latest operational update. [Read full update](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus). Highlights include:

- Mental Health and Addictions
- Cancer Care
- Northside General Hospital closed until further notice
- Cape Breton Regional Hospital ambulatory care scheduled relocating to New Waterford Consolidated Hospital
- Blood collection
- Sites designated for inpatient care of patient with COVID-19
- Assessment centres
- Facility entrances reminder
- Border closures
- Free parking reminder
Updated COVID-19 OHSW messages for staff
We’ve updated our COVID-19 occupational health, safety and wellness messages for staff to include information about international and interprovincial travel, and new Q&As. Please review here.

Personal Protective Equipment – What Staff Need to Know
Many staff have expressed concern about a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). We have heard those concerns. Here’s what you need to know at this point in time:

- Supply Chain has started taking strict conservation measures to help ensure we can meet identified needs over an extended period of time. For example, stock is being distributed in quantities sufficient for one to two weeks rather than your usual supply.
- NSHA currently has enough PPE to meet demands.
- Supply Chain has been planning since January for this outbreak and have been increasing and stockpiling PPE.
- NSHA is projecting and planning for the surge in cases we know is coming. These projections are based on a number of factors, including number of expected patient encounters, settings of care, predicted number of hospitalizations, predicted length of stay, numbers of staff caring for each patient, etc. We must take steps to ensure our supply meets the coming need.
- Projections about need are based on appropriate use of PPE.
- There have been some surges in demand that cannot easily be explained. ALL requests for PPE will be evaluated on the basis of reasonableness. We cannot afford to be distributing more than is needed to meet current demand, or to be using PPE inappropriately – we will need it when there is a surge in cases.
- Supply Chain is taking the following steps to increase supply of PPE:
  - Working to access federal supply of PPE
- Reaching out to non-traditional international markets to import additional PPE
- Preparing additional warehouse and distribution capacity to support COVID-19 needs
  - A working group, co-led by Dr. Alex Mitchell and Lewis Bedford, is working to ensure a provincial approach to this work.
  - In addition, an Emergency Innovation Team led by Gail Tomblin-Murphy, VP of Research and Innovation, is exploring possible innovative solutions to help meet the need.
  - We will continue to keep you updated on PPE supply as this situation develops.

**Clarifying compliance during provincial state of emergency**
Police enforce orders under the *Health Protection Act* (HPA) and *Emergency Management Act*. If Nova Scotians and businesses do not practice social distancing, self-isolation or follow other directives under HPA, they could face fines of $1,000 for individuals and $7,500 for businesses.

If you are aware of someone not following provincial direction, have a conversation with them first – they may need help. If a call to police is needed, please call a non-emergency number for the police that serve your community. Do not call 911.

Up-to-date information is always available at [novascotia.ca/coronavirus](http://novascotia.ca/coronavirus) – please provide to anyone who you think may have questions about self-isolation, physical distancing, etc.

**Assessment Centre update**
New locations for NSHA Assessment Centres continue to be added. [See updated list](http://novascotia.ca/coronavirus). An updated fax referral form can be found [here](http://novascotia.ca/coronavirus).
**REMINDER:** Wear your ID badges
Staff are asked to wear their identification badges at all times while at work. As part of the new visitor limitations directive, badges will be checked regularly and may be requested as you enter your building.

**New/Updated guidance documents**
- COVID-19 Guidelines for Contractors and Vendors (March 24, 2020)
- COVID-19 Assessment Clinic Cost Centres (March 24, 2020)
- Instructions on the use of statistical internal orders (March 24, 2020)

**Beware of COVID-19 fraud**
We have heard a few reports of situations where misinformation about COVID-19 cases is being reported in communities and to businesses, as well as fraudulent calls from people claiming to be Public Health and asking for credit card/financial information.
- Any notification of potential exposures to COVID-19 that need to be shared with individuals, businesses, organizations or communities will be shared officially by Public Health.
- When Public Health calls people to discuss COVID-19 test results or to follow-up through our investigations, financial information is NEVER asked for. If you receive a call like this asking for financial information, please do not provide your financial or personal information.

**Privacy reminder – colleagues’ health information**
Please remember that it is not appropriate to look up your colleagues’ health information unless you are directly providing them with care. Privacy will be performing both random and targeted audits and any inappropriate access will be investigated by the Privacy Office and you may be subject to disciplinary action as a result. If you have infection control concerns please reach out to Occupational Health and Safety.
Temporary suspension of the Colon Cancer Prevention Program
As NSHA focuses its efforts on managing the COVID-19 pandemic, we are suspending the Colon Cancer Prevention Program until further notice. This means:

- Home screening kits will not be mailed out.
- Home screening kits already at the lab and those that are already in the mail will be processed and the results will be mailed to participants.
- Participants who test positive for trace amounts of blood in the stool will not be contacted for an appointment until the screening program has restarted; screening nurses will, however, contact them to answer questions/ease their concerns.
- All screening colonoscopies which are currently booked will be cancelled until further notice.
- NSHA is contacting scheduled patients and clients directly to notify them of cancellations
- Nova Scotians who have received but have not yet done the home screening test should wait until the screening program resumes operations.
- Nova Scotians who have worrying symptoms of colon cancer will be directed to speak with their primary care provider.

Updated visitor restriction information pertaining to cancer patients
Recognizing the fine balance between the real needs for emotional support and the implications of spreading COVID-19 in our treatment areas to vulnerable patients, the following visitor/companion policy was implemented at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, March 24.

- Except under exceptional circumstances (e.g. mobility concerns, substitute decision maker in place, etc.) patients must attend appointments alone as per NSHA guidelines.
Inpatients

- We are encouraging the family members of cancer patients to adhere to the no-visitor restriction. If a patient has unique physical, emotional or cognitive complexity we will make an exception and allow one visitor to be present.

Treatment

- We are not permitting companions in the treatment venues, as the physical layout makes social distancing difficult and the vast majority of patients are immunocompromised.

Ambulatory clinics

- In keeping with cancer centres across Canada, the NSHA cancer care program will permit patients who are having their first appointment to bring one companion with them.

- We will also be giving the option to join in via phone/Facetime should companions not wish to enter the facility. For subsequent clinic visits, we are asking patients to respect the no visitor restriction but will make exceptions if the patient has unique physical, emotional or cognitive complexity impacting their ability to attend alone.

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.

**Phishing opportunities on the rise during COVID-19**
Please remember that cyberattacks like Phishing are on the rise with the COVID-19 Pandemic. NEVER enter your user name and password into a link that comes through an email. If you receive an email with a link that seems suspicious, it most likely is. Please send all questionable emails to reportphishing@nshealth.ca.

**Spectrum MD, antimicrobial stewardship app with current COVID-19 guidelines, is now available to NSHA for download**
Spectrum MD, an antimicrobial stewardship app, is now live and available to NSHA physicians, pharmacists and nurses. The app contains current management guidelines for COVID-19, Community Acquired Pneumonia and Influenza.

These guidelines are for adult patients in NSHA. Please refer to the IWK Spectrum app for information on managing pediatric, obstetrical, or gynecologic infections.

You can download the Spectrum MD app to your Android, iPhone or hand-held device at www.spectrum.app/nsha. Please note: If you do not have access to an Android, iPhone or other hand-held device, you can download the app to a computer, but you must download Google Chrome first. The app does not work with Internet Explorer.

The app has the feature of ‘push notifications’, which enables the posting and automatic notification of up-to-the-minute treatment guideline updates to all who have downloaded the app. The Spectrum app also contains a full listing of formulary antimicrobials with dosing guidelines and local pathogen sensitivity information. Additional treatment guidelines will be added as they become available.
Procurement card deadline
Due to COVID-19, the deadline for procurement cards holders to allocate and approve their transactions for the March 5 cutoff has been extended to Monday, April 6. All transactions from the March 5 cutoff date must be completed by this date. That includes having all back-ups and approvals electronically uploaded using the online US Bank Access Online System. If you have any questions, please reach out to your zone Procurement Card Administrator or to Elan Webber at elan.webber@nshealth.ca.

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. 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.

“Many thanks to all the people in the health care environment. I hope you feel confident in the leadership during this time of crisis. I feel safe. Many thanks!”

“Yesterday I had cause to meet a member of the Nova Scotia Health Authority for a blood test. I want you to know how much I appreciate her work and that of the staff in that location. Many many thanks.”

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.