

“NEW NORMAL” DIRECTIVES TO HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Health and Long-Term Care Minister Tony Clement today announced that, with the lifting of the SARS provincial emergency, the Eves government has issued “new normal” directions to healthcare providers and facilities.

The “new normal” will be characterized by high standards of practice that reflect a heightened awareness of emerging infectious diseases including SARS.

The goals of this new practice are:

- the prevention of exposure (i.e. identifying the personal protective equipment that healthcare professionals should wear in high-risk situations; continuing education about healthy behaviours in facilities and in the community);
- early detection of new cases with appropriate management, protection of others in the community and healthcare setting (i.e. SARS screening will continue in emergency departments; local health units will apply surveillance tools to ensure that all healthcare practitioners are aware of their responsibilities);
- full and appropriate management of patients with non-infectious disease healthcare needs (i.e. healthcare providers will incorporate the lessons learned from SARS in the routine management of all patients).

At this time, there still is the chance of sporadic re-introduction of SARS, particularly from recent travellers, resulting in local cases with the potential for transmission. Healthcare providers and facilities must continue to maintain a very high vigilance for communicable diseases (including SARS) and work together to ensure that the healthcare system can respond effectively.

These directives have been developed to assist facilities and healthcare practitioners to begin to practice in the “new normal” environment. These new directives began being implemented last Friday.

The directives for the acute care sector have been identified as transitional as they will change along with the evolving understanding of what is the best treatment of the disease.

Acute care hospitals must limit facility entrances to the minimum required to allow reasonable access of staff, patients and visitors.

The current visitor restrictions to hospitals are ending, and hospitals are expected to develop their own visitor policies.

The directives for community health care providers and agencies, CCACs, paramedics and ambulance communication services, and non-acute care facilities outline precautions to be used routinely. They also include measures to be used in the event of another outbreak.

All practitioners and healthcare workers can expect ongoing communication from the Ontario government as new information on the identification and treatment of this and other communicable diseases becomes available.