

March 9, 2020

**MEMORANDUM TO: Health System Organizations and Providers**

**SUBJECT: Update on COVID-19 Preparations and Actions**

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As we committed last week, we will be sharing frequent communications from the provincial Command Table, as we prepare for and address COVID-19.

The Command Table met this morning and discussed key topics to focus our preparations, including:

- Agreement on principles that will guide the design of all our operational work on COVID-19, including:
  - o Where possible, we will make services and access to screening more accessible to **patients in their homes**, to reduce the spread of illness
  - o Core **clinical capacity** (generally inpatient and critical care beds) will be protected for ongoing care of the sickest patients for COVID-19 and non COVID-19 related issues
  - o **New capacity will be created** to provide COVID-19 specific assessments and care (virtual and in person)
- Review and endorsement of plans for **Assessment Centres**. Assessment Centres sites will divert patients from hospital Emergency Departments, starting with sites in Toronto, and then elsewhere in the province as need arises. As Assessment Centres are ready for operation, some in the coming days, we will provide direction and information to health system providers and to the public.
- Review of plans to enhance surveillance activities, including the **expansion of laboratory capacity** in conjunction with Assessment Centres.
- Review of a **COVID-19 Self-Assessment**, which will be refined in consultation with experts and then posted to the ministry's public-facing website. This self-assessment will support patients who are concerned about COVID-19 and want to understand how to seek assessment and care.

- Review and approval of **virtual care capacity** to be leveraged in our COVID-19 response, including Telehealth expansion to support people at home and supports to encourage virtual care uptake.
- Review of evidence-based **guidance on use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**, which will be discussed with health system organizations and providers in the coming days, and then shared broadly. Our goal is the health and safety of health care workers and patients.
- **Initiation of a PPE Table** to report to the Command Table to address PPE supply and distribution, and system initiatives that will preserve PPE.
- Direction on measures for visitors and staff for implementation at **long-term care homes and retirement homes**.
- Discussion of **Health Human Resource strategies** for employers, with a Question and Answer document to be posted shortly. We continue to monitor the Government of Canada's travel advisories and advice from federal and provincial counterparts on travel and return to work.

As stated previously, we appreciate the continued focus on preparations that you are making within your organization, including planning and readiness for business continuity.

We will provide updates after our next Command Table meeting, scheduled for Thursday, March 11, 2020.

Thank you for your ongoing care and support of your patients and communities.

Sincerely,

*(original signed by)*

Helen Angus  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Health

Dr. David Williams  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Ministry of Health

Matthew Anderson  
President and CEO  
Ontario Health