

February 17, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Health System Organizations and Providers

SUBJECT: Update on COVID-19 Planning and Actions

This week, the Health Coordination Table focused on the following key actions to enable Ontario's health care system to effectively respond to COVID-19:

- **Monitoring the spread and incidence of the COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOC)**
 - Updated data on the testing and screening of known COVID-19 variants in Ontario were presented. Public health continues to investigate the causes of transmission in identified communities to inform pandemic response efforts. Plans to begin publicly reporting on VOC data were shared.
- **Continuing efforts to expand rapid diagnostic and screening tests in key priority sectors.**
 - The ministry is working in collaboration with multiple sectors including long-term care, education, retirement homes, essential industries, high priority communities, congregate living, vulnerable settings, and borders to implement rapid antigen screening and testing across the province.
 - As these tests are being administered in a variety of settings, the ministry has developed and communicated public health guidance on the administration of the tests to support its effective implementation.
- **Deploying additional surge and critical care capacity hospital beds to support ongoing pressures in the health system.**
 - The ministry continues to expand hospital capacity by opening additional beds in regions throughout the province. Furthermore, new critical care capacity and high intensity medicine beds have been approved and brought online, which can be activated within 24-48 hours.

- In collaboration with the federal government and Ontario Health, the ministry is also preparing for the development of mobile health units to ensure that additional hospital beds are rapidly available.
- **Ongoing focus on rapid testing, COVID-19 vaccination and enhanced infection prevention and control measures to protect residents, health care workers and essential visitors in long-term care and retirement homes.**
 - Ministry of Long-Term Care and the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility are continuing to be vigilant in promoting enhanced prevention measures to ensure that cases and facility outbreaks continue to decline.
 - Rapid testing will be further expanded to all long-term care homes and will be conducted up to three times a week for staff, students, volunteers, and caregivers. Vaccinations in both retirement homes and long-term care homes will continue to be provided for staff and residents as they become available. Enhancements in IPAC measures in both sectors will be reinforced to prevent and support rapid management of outbreaks.
- **Reviewing recent scientific literature to understand the efficacy of the drug Tocilizumab and supplement Vitamin D in the treatment of COVID-19.**
 - The Science Advisory Table presented evidence in support of the effectiveness of the pharmaceutical drug Tocilizumab in the treatment of moderately to severely-ill COVID-19 patients.
 - Evidence presented for the use of Vitamin D as a treatment for COVID-19 remains unclear and further investigation is required.

We thank you for your continued work to respond to the pandemic and implement a phased recovery.

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

Helen Angus
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health

Dr. David Williams
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