

March 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:

- **Ongoing focus on testing by reviewing the expansion of the rapid antigen screening program and planning for the next phase of the testing strategy.**
 - The expansion of the Rapid Antigen Screening Program continues within the energy sector, fire and police, trucking and transportation, wastewater management and water treatment facilities, post-secondary institutions, and additional healthcare institutions as the incidence of the Variants of Concern (VOCs) continue to rise.
 - The ministry continues to monitor how testing can best respond to evolving pandemic needs, including consideration of the impacts of both increased vaccination and the VOCs.
- **Continuing efforts to recruit, train and deploy health human resources and support critical care capacity to manage the evolving pandemic response.**
 - The ministry is continuing to scale-up existing programs in the home and community care and long-term care sectors to ensure there is an adequate number of resources to support programs, improve ease of access and ensure workforce stabilization post-pandemic. In addition, work is underway to ensure sufficient health human resources are available for future vaccination clinics.
 - In collaboration with Ontario Health, the ministry is continuing efforts to build additional acute and critical care capacity, and closely monitor hospitalization rates across the province. With assistance from the federal government, the ministry has initiated the deployment of a mobile health unit at Sunnybrook

Health Sciences and preparations are underway to mobilize a second unit at another hospital, as required.

- **Adapting Ontario’s lab strategy to more effectively and efficiently detect and mitigate COVID-19 VOCs.**
 - Public Health Ontario is updating its lab strategy on genomics to detect, monitor, and mitigate against the introduction, development and spread of known and emerging VOCs to provide a more timely and effective public health response.
- **Ongoing implementation of prevention, monitoring and supportive strategies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the retirement home sector.**
 - The Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility provided an update on the ongoing pandemic efforts relating to testing, surveillance, visitor policies, enhanced infection prevention and control measures, and vaccination uptake in the retirement homes sector.
- **Reviewing the most recent scientific evidence by the Science Advisory Table to inform the government’s ongoing pandemic response.**
 - Joint analysis from the Science Advisory Table and the Testing Expert Panel was presented on the continued use of rapid testing in long-term care homes, in consideration of vaccination efforts within the sector.
 - The latest projection data on the variant B.1.1.7 was presented, indicating its dominance in the current epidemic curve, it’s detectability through wastewater analysis, and the potential increased risk associated with hospitalization, ICU admissions, and mortality.

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

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

Helen Angus
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