

April 8, 2020

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

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

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In follow-up to our last communication, we are pleased to share the following updates from the provincial Command Table on key actions that are being taken to address COVID-19:

**Managing Disease Spread:**

- **Enhancing the suite of provincial public health measures** based on recommendations from the Public Health Measures Table led by Dr. David McKeown. Recommendations from this table are informed by emerging evidence and are in keeping with guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada. Based on these recommendations, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health will be:
  - o Issuing new guidance on the use of using cloth (non-medical) masks by members of the public where physical distancing is a challenge or not possible, and ensuring that the use of medical masks is reserved for health care workers, emergency responders, and individuals who need to leave their homes for essential reasons; and
  - o Considering additional public health measures based on further advice from the Public Health Measures Table (e.g., public gatherings, enhanced protections for essential businesses, urban/rural travel).
  
- Begin **immediate implementation of a new lab testing strategy** to utilize testing capacity in the system, support further population testing and contain outbreaks. Immediate actions include:
  - Immediately updating CMOH testing guidance based on recommendations from the Provincial Diagnostic Network Operations Centre to **expanded testing in long-term care homes and in retirement homes**, to protect these vulnerable populations;
  - Quickly developing an approach for broadening testing guidance to **additional priority populations** such as Indigenous and remote communities, health care workers, first responders, other vulnerable populations (e.g., those in congregate living situations and institutions); and

- **Supporting the effective implementation** of updated testing guidance across sectors.
- Continue **aggressive management of COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care homes**, supported by a revised CMOH Directive #3 that strengthens screening, testing, and outbreak management for long-term care homes.

## **Expanding Health System Capacity**

- Continue to **implement new bed capacity** to meet anticipated demands based on bed capacity targets informed by updated modelling information through:
  - Improvements in data collection to proactively identify regional hot spots and gaps and align increases to capacity in those areas; and
  - Ongoing implementation of new field sites and improved communications to support access to these sites.
- Continue to target actions to ensure Ontario's patients and workers have the **critical supplies and equipment** they need through:
  - Ongoing efforts to procure all available supplies and equipment to support Ontario's patients and workers;
  - Active redistribution to priority sites experiencing critical shortages or outbreaks;
  - Improved data collection on PPE consumption rates, based on updated modelling information and updated guidance to the sector on PPE to support proactive planning for PPE supply and distribution needs across the system; and
  - Strategies to ensure appropriate access to PPE to keep front-line workers safe (e.g., reprocessing of PPE and substitution of non-clinical PPE).
- [Launched](#) the new [Ontario Health Workforce Matching Portal](#) yesterday to facilitate ~4,000 potential matches by the end of April, beginning with the providers and settings that have the greatest capacity challenges.
- Established a dedicated **Mental Health and Addictions Table** led by Ontario Health's Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence to address issues related to access to PPE, targeted guidance for the mental health and addictions sector and mental health and addictions supports for health care workers.

We will continue to keep you apprised of actions taken in these key areas and work with you to develop solutions as our pandemic response unfolds.

Thank you for your ongoing engagement with your local partners to prepare for business continuity and for COVID-19's impact on the health system.

Sincerely,

*(original signed by)*

Helen Angus

Dr. David Williams

Matthew Anderson

Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Health

Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Ministry of Health

President and CEO  
Ontario Health