

Forwarded on behalf of Dr. Janet Kow, PHC Senior Medical Director Acute Care and Amanda Harvey, Corporate Director and St. Paul's Site Co-Lead.

Please share with staff, medical staff, researchers and volunteers and post for those who do not have access to email.



March 17, 2020 – 6:00 PM

MESSAGE FROM FIONA DALTON, PRESIDENT & CEO, PROVIDENCE HEALTH CARE



Dear Providence Family,

There are no easy words to talk about the COVID-19 situation that we face today, but I will do my best. We are facing an unknown future but true to our Providence history, we are facing it together.

There is so much that we don't know – but we are learning more every day about the epidemiology of this disease, how it is spread and how it affects patients. We are also learning how the whole fabric of our society will be affected in ways that we had not imagined just a couple of weeks ago. Communication that was right yesterday becomes wrong today, as the world keeps changing around us.

In this situation I suspect that we all feel powerless in so many areas. We have no control of government decisions to close services and reduce social transmission, no control of the international supply of PPE or the supplies for COVID-19 testing.

However, I can promise you that we will do everything in our power to ensure that we are as prepared as we can be, and that we protect our staff to the absolute best of our ability – in

particular doing everything that we can to get the best PPE. This includes using every bit of influence that we have. To deliver on this promise, we will need all of us working together and I am grateful for the commitment, skill and knowledge of leaders who are focused on this across the organization. This promise is being made at a time when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is instructing everyone to work at home where possible; but reality is that the majority of Providence staff are still coming to work – because this is where we are needed.

(For those staff who can work at home – thank you for doing so, and for this contribution towards social distancing. We may need you to come in to work at some point in the future and thank you in advance for your flexibility on this).

As Providence, we have a history of doing the right thing in times of crisis. I wasn't here in Vancouver for the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but many people have talked to me about how St. Paul's cared for patients before the epidemic even had a name and in the midst of the fear and panic it caused across society.

Whilst HIV/AIDS mostly impacted specific vulnerable populations, COVID-19 disproportionately (but, of course, not exclusively) impacts a different vulnerable population – the frail and elderly. This means that our long term care homes are at the front line, as well as our Emergency Departments, ICUs and acute medical units for the severely unwell. As with HIV/AIDS, the laboratory services are crucial to rapid understanding of the epidemic. But we must also remember all of the other services that need to keep going – patients still need their renal dialysis, will still be in acute psychiatric distress, will still experience sudden crushing central chest pain. And we still need corporate functions (like payroll, staffing and Occupational Health & Safety!) to keep going.

So we are a family – we stand together and we will come through this by supporting each other.

These are just words, and I don't underestimate the reality of what these words mean in practice. I know how much we are asking of you, and I hear your fears and concerns as well as seeing your bravery. In the last few days, I have seen egotism being put aside for the wider good. I have seen uncomplaining dedication at the end of yet another 14-hour day. I have seen courage to talk about the difficult issues and I have seen leadership from so many people across so many teams. I have seen quiet heroism as individuals step forward to take on the riskiest jobs and protect their colleagues. In all, I have seen hundreds of individual actions, both small and large – all of which add up to something very special. These actions – your actions – define us as Providence.

With all my best wishes,

Fiona

THE LATEST

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge in the last 50 years of health care. The BC Government announced today that B.C. is now in a state of public health emergency. As we enter a more rapidly growing phase of the epidemic, we need to be prepared to meet the additional demands on our health care system.

Staff and medical staff should not be at work experiencing symptoms

To ensure the safety of our patients, clients, residents and each other, employees and medical staff should **not** be working if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). They should get tested immediately and self-isolate at home.

Already in BC we have had several instances where health care workers have come to work with mild symptoms and inadvertently infected colleagues. Of course there is a natural wish to be at work, to look after our patients and to support our colleagues – but in the current epidemic it's really important that we resist this temptation and stay away from work. Assessment and testing for COVID-19 is also available for all symptomatic staff (currently via SPH and MSJ EDs) – please come and be assessed if you are at all concerned.

SITUATION UPDATE

Update on new and existing COVID-19 cases

- The Ministry of Health announced today that three additional people who had tested positive for COVID-19 have passed away. Two of the cases are connected to the Lynn Valley Care Centre (LVCC), and one case was related to the Fraser Health Authority. This brings the number of deaths in B.C. to seven.
- The Ministry also confirmed 83 new cases in B.C. for a total of 186 cases in the province. The individuals are in the Vancouver Coastal, Fraser, Island and Interior health regions.
- Of these cases, seven are in hospital (including four in ICU), and the rest are self-isolating at home. Two of these cases are at St. Paul's Hospital.
- The Provincial Government also announced today that B.C. is now in a state of public health emergency. All schools Kindergarten to Grade 12 are closed for the foreseeable future.
- As of March 16, British Columbia's health authorities moved all hospitals in the province to Outbreak Response Phase 2. This means hospitals will undertake only urgent and emergency procedures and will postpone all non-urgent scheduled surgeries. Hospitals will review operating-room capacity daily to prioritize urgent and emergency cases.
- Lions Gate Hospital in the Vancouver Coastal Health region is directed to move to Outbreak Response Phase 3. This means the hospital will accept only emergency patients. Lions Gate Hospital is also preparing to open a dedicated COVID-19 unit to provide care to those with the virus. Please note that there is currently NOT an outbreak of COVID-19 at Lions Gate Hospital: moving to Outbreak Response Phase 3 is a preventative measure.

Federal Government update

- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau held a briefing Tuesday morning, formally recognizing frontline healthcare staff, doctors, nurses, administrators, cleaning staff, and retired healthcare professionals returning to care for patients for their efforts during this challenging time. "Let's do more than say thank you, let's do what we can to lighten their load," Trudeau encouraged all Canadians.
- The PM also spoke more specifically about the Federal Government's plan to contain COVID-19, building on the measures he put into place March 16 regarding Canada's borders and financial support.

- For more information on these new measures read the **[March 17 backgrounder from Public Health Canada here.](#)**
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Important Supply Updates

Hand Sanitizer: Our supply chain informs us we currently have an adequate supply of hand sanitizer, although not all dispenser sizes are available. To address demand, some vendors are increasing their production through extra shifts.

N95 respirators: To protect our supply of N95 respirators, we have put stringent controls in place. N95 respirators are only to be used when indicated for airborne precautions. They are not to be used for droplet/contact precautions.

Fit testing: To help preserve our provincial stock of respirators and reduce any unnecessary use, we are suspending all N95 fit-testing immediately. If you have been previously fit tested, you are to use the mask you were tested on. If you have never been fit tested, you may not provide care to a patient who requires airborne precautions.

With these changes, the majority of departments now have significant percentage of their staff with a valid fit-test. As a result, departments should have sufficiently fit-tested staff available at any given time. Departments are required to utilize staff members that have been fit-tested within the past two years to provide care for patients where an N95 respirator is required (e.g. airborne precautions, performing Aerosol Generating Medical Procedures on droplet precautions patients). If you do not have sufficient staff fit tested in your department to meet this need, contact scoughlin@providencehealth.bc.ca

New rules for visiting long-term care residents

New information from BC's Provincial Health Officer today requires that our **Long-Term Care Facilities restrict visitors to essential visits only.**

This will minimize the risk of the introduction of COVID-19 into facilities and allow staff to focus on caring for residents, rather than monitoring and screening visitors.

Examples of essential visits include, but are not limited to:

- visits for compassionate care (end of life and critical illness)
- visits considered paramount to resident care and well-being, such as assistance with feeding or mobility
- existing registered volunteers providing services as described above only

A reminder that current guidance still applies to those essential visitors to our LTC facilities

- Do not visit if you've travelled outside of the country.
- Stay away if you're sick.
- Wash your hands.
- Visit directly in resident rooms rather than common areas.

Cancelling leaves

Health authorities and Providence Health Care will allow all staff to cancel all pre-approved leaves scheduled in the next sixty (60) days, including vacation, union leaves, banked overtime leaves, etc., effective Friday, March 13, 2020.

Requests to cancel leaves will not require manager/HR approval. This means that managers will not need to approve employee requests to cancel previously approved planned leaves and will not need to consult with their HR Advisor. Though there is no need for manager approval, employees are required as per the process below to ensure their leaders know that their leaves are being cancelled.

To cancel an approved leave scheduled in the next sixty (60) days, please follow the process below:

- Staff must complete the [Scheduling Change Request Form](#) and submit it to their manager.
- Managers will then directly inform their staffing clerk of the cancellation (i.e., no need to engage HR in the process).
- Cancellations will be permitted even when a unit has scheduled other staff to replace the employee on leave.
- All Nurses' Bargaining Association (NBA) & part-time Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) employees who are scheduled to provide back-fill may be re-deployed; their shifts will not be cancelled.
- Requests to cancel leaves of absence outside this period should continue to be submitted using the [Approved Leave or Vacation Change Request Process](#).

School closures

Earlier today, Premier John Horgan announced the decision to suspend all B.C. elementary and secondary schools until further notice to help prevent the spread of COVID-19; plans to return to classes would be discussed at a later date. John Horgan noted today that it is crucial for employees in essential services to have childcare during this time and the team here at PHC agrees. Currently, the ministry is working to address daycare and childcare needs and more information on what this means for our staff will be forthcoming.

Greeters and hand hygiene

We know that frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Over the past couple of days, you will have seen “greeters” at the entrances to our facilities, ready to squirt you with hand sanitizer. The greeters are also doing their best to enforce the acute visiting policy – that is, to ensure that no one comes into the acute hospital if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms, and that only family are visiting patients. Please make sure

you take a moment to stop and take this opportunity to start your day in your facility with clean hands, while being respectful of the request of greeters to not be in the hospital if you're not visiting patients and/or are experiencing respiratory symptoms.

Offsite COVID-19 assessment site for PHC employees launching soon

- In collaboration with VCH, a dedicated off-site assessment centre for PHC and VCH staff is scheduled to open on Friday.
 - Details will be made available as soon as possible.
 - **For now, PHC staff who need testing can go to either the MSJ or SPH Emergency Departments and identify themselves.** More information on the criteria for testing and the process is available on our website [HERE](#).
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MEDICAL STAFF UPDATE

Doctors of BC Quarantine and Insurance Programs

An important update has been made to the availability of the Doctors of BC Quarantine and Insurance Programs for physicians require to self-quarantine due to potential exposure outside of their work environment.

For Physicians Quarantined Due to COVID-19 Exposure outside of their Occupation (examples would include returning from travel abroad):

- Physicians enrolled in the Physician Disability Insurance plan may claim for their time in quarantine or self-isolation, under the same parameters as noted in the link provided below.
- The Quarantine Income Replacement benefit is not available for non-occupational exposure.

More information is available at [the Doctors of BC website](#).

Social Media and COVID-19

All staff and medical staff are reminded that PHC has a social media policy and guidelines. Staff have the right of free speech as private citizens, but they are still bound by existing organizational policies and must not disclose any confidential or personal information or PHC content that they are not specifically authorized to disclose. **This includes taking photos on a PHC site and posting them online or on social media.** For more information on PHC's Social Media Policy, [click here](#).

Questions?

If you have questions or concerns, please email COVID-19@providencehealth.bc.ca.

Information and resource links:

PHC has launched a website for staff, medical staff, and researchers to address concerns, questions, protocols and guidelines around sick-leave and compensation-in-lieu for COVID-19. [Click here](#) to view the website. This website will be updated daily and is accessible from work and home on your mobile or desktop devices.