

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 18, 2020 – 6:00 PM**

**The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge in the last 50 years of health care. 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.**

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#### **BREAKING NEWS**

- On Wednesday, the Ministry of Health confirmed 45 new cases of COVID-19 in B.C. for a total of 231 cases in the province. The individuals are in the Vancouver Coastal, Fraser, Island and Interior health regions.
- Of these cases, 13 are in hospital (including seven in ICU), and the rest are self-isolating at home. Three of these cases are at St. Paul's Hospital, including an elderly man who is from the VCH contracted long-term care facility Haro Park Centre, located in Vancouver's West End.
- The provincial government also declared a state of emergency in British Columbia as of Wednesday. Dr. Bonnie Henry advised that the next seven to 10 days will be very important to stop the chain of transmission in the province.
- Since yesterday's announcement from Premier John Horgan of the decision to suspend all B.C. elementary and secondary schools until further notice to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, work is ongoing to address daycare and childcare needs for families with parents who provide crucial essential services including health care. PHC supports this work and more information on what this means for our staff will be forthcoming.
- The Federal Government has temporarily closed the U.S. border to all but essential traffic.

- 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.
- For the latest Canadian updates, visit the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) website.
- For the latest global case counts, please see the WHO situation reports, [available here](#).

The Province has created 1 888 COVID-19 to connect British Columbians needing non-medical information about COVID-19. This includes the latest information on travel recommendations and social distancing, as well as access to support and resources from the provincial and federal governments. 1 888 COVID-19 is available seven days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. in 110 languages. The 811 number is also in place for medical-related COVID-19 questions.

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**MESSAGE FROM DR. JANET KOW, PHC SENIOR MEDICAL DIRECTOR ACUTE CARE:  
FLATTEN THE PPE Usage CURVE!**



Dear Providence Family,

Some staff members have expressed concern about running out of Personal Protective Equipment or PPEs. PPEs include masks, gowns, visors, and so on.

I want to address these concerns and ask you all to take some mindful steps to protect our supplies. In mid-January, we had enough N95 respiratory masks to last us several months. Two weeks later, as news of COVID-19 emerged overseas, our usage had increased SIX fold – even though not a single COVID-19 patient had been admitted to our hospitals. At that rate, we knew we only had weeks of supply left, not months.

Now, thanks to sourcing additional supplies, we do have more in stock. But as the virus has spread, there is now a global shortage of PPEs. This makes it very important for us to safeguard our remaining supplies.

**Working as a team, this is what we'll focus on:**

You've heard a lot about curves lately, so we need your help to **FLATTEN THE PPE Usage CURVE!**

**Here are two steps that you can take:**

**First, consider our usage guidelines and the science they rely on.** While there has been speculation about asymptomatic spread, at this moment, this is theoretical. And, we think the risk is pretty low. But consider this: every time you use any mask outside the guidelines to

theoretically decrease your risk, that's one less mask for someone in the emergency department on Medicine or in the ICU. This is your future self and your colleagues who may be caring for a COVID-19 patient 4 or 6 weeks from now.

### **Second, remind each other to flatten the PPE usage curve!**

Support comes in many forms. If you see unnecessary use of PPEs, just gently remind your colleagues that we need to rely on what we know about transmission and stick to the guidelines. A supportive and reassuring word may be all it takes to remember that we're in this together and need to take small, mindful actions to protect us all in higher risk situations.

Thank you for your efforts to **flatten the PPE usage curve**, and thank you for your hard work and dedication to our patients and residents. By working as a team, we will all have the necessary protection and emerge from this challenge safely.

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### **Enhanced cleaning increased across PHC sites**

In order to keep our patients and staff safe within in our hospitals and facilities, enhanced cleaning practices have increased across PHC and VCH. With this increased demand, we want to optimize and focus our housekeeping resources across PHC and VCH sites.

Critical areas that present high risk for Coronavirus transmission have been identified to be prioritized for enhanced cleaning. These include areas include but are not limited to:

- Emergency Departments, Intensive Care Units, and High Acuity Units
- Long Term Care lobbies, dining rooms, and nursing stations
- High traffic areas (lobbies, waiting areas in acute and LTC)
- Public washrooms and other high touch points.

We need your help! We ask that any requests for enhanced cleaning be directed to managers, directors, and brought to your local EOC.

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### **Working remotely during COVID-19**

All of us are vital to sustaining our health care system during COVID-19. PHC clinical staff are on the front lines, while corporate staff are working hard to ensure the running of operations – we are all essential during this very difficult time.

We are supporting staff to work from home where possible, but the reality is that the majority of us – clinical and non-clinical staff – are coming to work because this is where we are needed. The decision of who can/should work remotely is at the discretion of your leader and will be based on your role and responsibilities and our IT system's overall capacity to support remote access.

The IMITS team received more than 1,000 requests for Citrix between Friday, March 13 and Monday, March 16. These requests cannot be accommodated at this time. Our Informatics team is working hard with IMITS on increasing capacity as well as the prioritization process for remote

access requests. More information will be forthcoming, but it will take some time. For those staff who already have remote access and can work from home, you may be called on to come to work at some point, and we thank you in advance for your flexibility.

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## Health and wellness

While governments are urging all Canadians to stay home, we know you are being inundated with messages and may feel conflicted. We all need to remain vigilant about hand hygiene and heed this advice from Sandy Coughlin, Director, Occupational Health & Safety.

*Wash your hands, don't touch your face, please stay at home when you're sick and try to minimize the "noise" surrounding COVID-19 as best you can. Use PHC's COVID-19 staff website as your source of truth about what's happening as it's updated every day and contains the most current factual information. Try not to get caught up in all the conflicting stories and information as it will only serve to increase any anxiety you might have and recognize that anxiety in this incredibly stressful time we are in is normal. Please reach out and talk to me if you are struggling – don't wait until it becomes too much.*

During this time, we encourage you to review the resources we have available on the staff mental health & mental wellness website.

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## New regulations for retail food service at hospital sites

Retail food services locations in our healthcare sites present a risk for COVID-19 transmission. The following recommendations have been approved for PHC, VCH and PHSA retail food locations at hospital sites across the Lower Mainland.

- Eliminate disposable plates, bowls, lids, cutlery and napkins from public access to be offered or handed out "upon request."
- Close all self-serve food and beverage stations from public access. Accommodate individual orders by placing them directly with retail food staff behind the counter and served by retail food staff.
- Provide single-serve packaged items in condiment stations (eliminate all bulk dispensed condiment, cream/milk containers in use).
- Restrict or eliminate cash payment transactions.
- Provide alcohol-based hand rubs in the food premise for patrons.
- Place appropriate signage as requested by EHO (e.g. hand hygiene, and cough/sneeze etiquette, at retail food service entrance).
- Enhance and increase the cleaning frequency of high-touch areas. Increase frequency of cleaning in seating areas during operating hours to a minimum of once every four hours and more frequently as required.
- Retail food service designated seating (cafeteria): reduce seating to <50 and implement seating arrangements that allow for social distancing (2 metres) capability.
- Public area seating adjacent to retail outlets: no restrictions.
- Retail food service operators to effectively communicate all changes to customers through all staff bulletins and emails and through appropriate signage within their retail outlet.

Please note that all recommendations are minimum requirements and subject to changes based on site leadership request and/or further government direction.

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### Virtual Health Update

**We are now provisioning Zoom licenses for physicians conducting Virtual Health sessions** with clinic patients and in support of social distancing. A licensed version of Zoom provides more functionality than the free version.

**If you want to use Zoom, complete this form:**

<https://surveys.divisionsbc.ca/ZoomAccount.survey>.

Additional Zoom resources/user guides have been added [here](#).

**It's vital we reserve PHC's network capacity for critical clinical applications**, and therefore we ask physicians using Virtual Health to:

- Use a corporate device and turn off Wifi. Rogers and Telus have lifted data limits for corporate devices
  - Use a personal mobile device and data plan
  - Conduct video visits from home, using your own internet connection.
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### Billing rules change: New COVID-19 billing code for virtual care

As of March 17, the Ministry of Health has established a new ICD-9 code (C19) for use with COVID-19.

Doctors of BC and the provincial government have agreed to billing rule changes enabling physicians to better utilize virtual care (telephone and telehealth) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary changes are part of the overall plan to improve patient flow by reducing the number of in-person visits to physician offices.

The following is effective immediately, with an end date to be determined by the Provincial Health Officer:

- The requirement that telehealth fees must involve video technology has been expanded to include telephone. Therefore, if you conduct services via telephone you can bill the appropriate telehealth fee codes in your fee guide. This includes services for all patients including COVID-19 patients.
- Consultations, office visits, and non-procedural interventions where there is no telehealth fee may be claimed under the face-to-face fee with a **claim note record** that the service was provided via video technology or telephone are payable by MSP.
- The general practice daily volume limits are suspended.

Services directly related to COVID-19 should include diagnostic code C19. Physicians should continue to use their professional judgement to determine whether use of virtual technology is clinically appropriate based on the circumstances of each patient.

More information about the billing changes can be found at [the Doctors of BC website.](#)

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### PHC Greeter Program update

Thank you to those who have volunteered your time and services these past few days and weeks. We are still in need of greeters to volunteer and fill positions over the next few days at all Providence sites. Greeters ensure that all patients, residents, limited visitors, as well as staff and volunteers wash and sanitize their hands before entering the hospital and/or long-term care sites.

Currently, greeters at our long-term care sites are further supporting the new visitor limitation protocols. This includes communicating the new visitor restrictions such as, allowing only one immediate family member to enter if they are supporting a loved one during end of life or with feeding and mobility support at our long term care sites. Greeters will also remind visitors to not enter the premises if they are unwell and if it is not an urgent requirement.

Thank you for your support and efforts during this time. It is appreciated by not only the organization, but also by the people that we serve.

If you would like to support and be a greeter, please email the Quality Performance & Improvement Team at the following email address: [PHCclinicalnonclinicalcovid19@providencehealth.bc.ca](mailto:PHCclinicalnonclinicalcovid19@providencehealth.bc.ca) and please provide your name, your preferred location, available date(s), times, and shifts that you are able to cover. Thank you for considering this request and your support.

### Be kind to each other during these stressful times

Our dietitians at St. Paul's Hospital are doing just that, appropriately on Dietitian's Day. When all their Nutrition Month events were cancelled due to COVID-19, they decided to do something good with the food products they had obtained from generous sponsors. All the nutritious food, including canned fish and hemp hearts, will now be going to the local food bank.

**“We think during this unprecedented and scary time, it’s important to show kindness and remember to help those are vulnerable around us.”**

They'd also like to urge people not to hoard food, as it can leave nothing for those who are especially vulnerable. We all have a responsibility to care for others.  
#caremongering #spreadkindnesslikeyouspreadnutella #compassion

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### Questions or Concerns?

If you have questions or concerns, please email [COVID-19@providencehealth.bc.ca](mailto:COVID-19@providencehealth.bc.ca).

**Information and resource links:**

PHC has 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. **THIS SHOULD BE YOUR SOURCE OF TRUTH FOR INFORMATION.**