



COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

March 15, 2020

UPDATE: COVID-19 impact to staff, medical staff and researchers

We'd like to thank all our health-care providers who are providing critical and ongoing care to our patients, clients and residents amid COVID-19. The situation is rapidly changing and we are humbled by the immense support of all members of our team.

As we become aware of new information in regards to COVID-19 and our experiences within PHC, there may be times when we need to quickly respond and augment our plans. Thank you so much for your flexibility and willingness to work together with us as we do our very best to activate our response plans amid these changing circumstances.

We continue to be extremely grateful for your support and commitment and hope you find these updates helpful in keeping everyone informed.

LATEST NEWS

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SITUATION UPDATE

Update on new and existing COVID-19 cases in B.C.

Overall

As of March 14 (the most recent Minister Dix and Dr. Bonnie Henry announcement), nine new cases have been announced in BC for a total of 73 confirmed cases. The individuals are in the VCH, Fraser and Interior health regions.

Providence has now had two patients who presented at our hospitals and tested positive for COVID-19. They have been admitted to our sites — one at St. Paul's and one at MSJ. Thank you to all staff that have enabled these admissions and are providing excellent care.

Thank you also to our Emergency Departments and the Virology Lab for enabling prompt testing of staff who may have concerns.

Five cases are connected to a cluster at the **Lynn Valley Care Centre (LVCC)**, one case is linked to travel from Portugal and the remaining cases are under investigation.

Full infection prevention and control precautions are in place at LVCC to protect both residents and staff who are not affected. As a result of the outbreak, health-care workers at the LVCC are permitted to only work at that site, and screening has been set up for both visitors and care workers to ensure no one with respiratory symptoms enters the facility.

On Friday, we learned that one additional administrative staff member at **Lions Gate Hospital (LGH)** has tested positive for COVID-19. There are now three administrative staff who have tested positive. They are self-isolating at home and are recovering. Public Health continues to investigate the source of transmission and are following up with staff who may have had close contact with these people. These individuals have not worked in any clinical areas of LGH. All visitors to the hospital will be screened by security or LGH volunteers to determine if they are showing signs or symptoms associated with COVID-19.

POLICY UPDATE

New Testing Criteria

Testing is available for all who need it, but not everyone requires a test. Members of the public who have no symptoms, mild symptoms or are returning from travel and self-isolating at home do not require a test.

Testing is for those who have severe illness, require hospitalization, are residents of long-term care facilities or are health care workers. These groups will continue to be tested. (See [this section](#) for more information on health care worker testing.) We will also test anyone part of an active investigation or outbreak cluster.

POLICY UPDATE

COVID-19 procedures in ambulatory care

One of the principles guiding our COVID-19 risk-mitigation strategies is that of "social distancing". Large groups of people sitting or congregating together is being discouraged by public health experts. The waiting rooms in PHC's numerous ambulatory and outpatient care settings are especially risky.

For that reason, and to further develop capacity and ensure health care resources are being prioritized for the most serious and critical needs, the activities for PHC's ambulatory care clinics are being scaled down. In general, in the coming days and weeks, activities will focus on the most urgent cases. [Virtual and telehealth](#) care and consultations are being urged between patients and providers/clinics to manage patients' elective needs in the most effective manner for them and the health care system.

RESOURCE / SUPPLIES

N95 respirator, mask and Microsan inventory control information for PHC departments

With the increase in COVID-19 activity across the world, the global demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) has also increased, particularly for N95 respirators, surgical and procedure masks and Microsan. At PHC, it is essential each department takes step to share in the responsibility of maintaining our stock.

One key way to do this is to continually encourage proper PPE usage. Protecting the health and safety of staff and medical staff has been a focus during the COVID-19 crisis. Information is available on the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks and gowns, etc. (see <http://covid19.providencehealthcare.org/guidelines/masks-and-personal-protective-equipment>).

Due to extreme high demand for PPE throughout the system, it's important not just to know when to properly use the supplies, but also when NOT to use these. **Staff are not to wear any of the PPE if not providing direct patient care.** If you have been at the bedside with PPE on, you must REMOVE it (gown, gloves, mask, goggles/face shield, etc.) to walk away. It is advised that the only time you can be moving through hallways and non-patient care areas with PPE on is when you are moving WITH a patient.

All health authorities and partners are working hard to ensure adequate PPE supplies are available to ensure sustained protection and safety of staff, patients, and residents. Health care staff and providers are requested to ensure proper usage of PPE to help meet the expected ever-increasing demands. Staff are encouraged to ask their supervisor, use online information or to contact the numerous organizational resources (IPAC, OH&S, etc.) to get clarity on PPE usage.

POLICY UPDATE

Working from home for non-health care staff

Following the Government of Canada's recommendation on working from home, PHC fully agrees that it is best if non health care staff who can work from home do so as soon as possible in order to proactively increase social distancing. We understand that this may not be possible for all staff but for those that can, we are asking you **not** to come into your usual work site and instead, work remotely. We are not closing the corporate offices entirely and if there are items you need to be able to work remotely you will have access to come in and get them.

Your leaders have all been informed and are working on a plan to make this happen. For those who have concerns about working from home due to the nature of their job or do not have the technological support to be able to do so, please ensure that you are in touch with your leader as soon as possible. We are working with our IT department and PHSA IMITS team to be able set up staff to work from home as quickly as possible, but we do ask for your patience with this process.

Though the request for now is to work remotely whenever possible, please be aware that depending on the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, you may, at some point, be asked to provide support and assistance to our clinical staff at our sites.

Also, if you have signed up for one of the **Greeter Program** shifts (see more details in Greeter Program item below), we ask that you honour your commitment and come in for those shifts. We are also looking for more volunteers for the Greeter shifts, so please help out where you can.

POLICY UPDATE

Visitor restrictions at all PHC and VCH sites

Visitors will be restricted to immediate family members only at all Providence Health Care and Vancouver Coastal Health sites. This measure is in place as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of patients, employees and medical staff. It also allows us to strengthen our infection control measures.

Talking points for switchboard, security, volunteers, visitor info desks and administration are available on our PHC COVID website [here](#).

We are also discussing tighter controls on public access at St. Paul's, including limiting the number of entrances. We will update you when we have more information.

PHC Greeter Program for site entrances launches

We are expanding the new Greeter Program across all PHC sites commencing on Monday, March 16th. The Greeter Program will ensure that all patients, residents, family members, and visitors, as well as staff and volunteers are reminded to sanitize their hands before entering a hospital and/or long-term care site. Greeters will also remind visitors to not enter the premises if they are unwell and that visiting should be family members only. The Greeter Program will be at all PHC sites, including:

- St. Paul's Hospital
- Mount Saint Joseph's Hospital
- Holy Family
- Youville
- Langara
- Honoria Conway
- Brock Fahrni

This initiative will help keep our patients, residents, volunteers, and staff safe and help prevent the spread of viruses. Please stay tuned for further communications on this new initiative as well as its detailed schedule for each site.

Sign-up to be a greeter

We are still looking for greeters for this new program. Currently, numerous shifts are available over the coming weeks. If you would like to be a greeter, please email the Quality Performance & Improvement Team at PHCclinicalnonclinicalcovid19@providencehealth.bc.ca and provide your name, your preferred location, available date(s), time, and shifts that you are able to cover.

This is a great opportunity for each of us to do meaningful and very important work in reducing the spread of the virus. Thank you for considering this request and your support during this time.

Interest and/or questions about the new Greeter Program can be directed to: PHCclinicalnonclinicalcovid19@providencehealth.bc.ca

POLICY UPDATE

Updated vacation and travel information

PHC supports staff who may wish to cancel their scheduled vacation over the next 60 days. Please contact your manager if you are cancelling your vacation so that you can reschedule the vacation at a later date in 2020. PHC will not cancel any casuals who were booked to continue to work during the previously scheduled vacation. However, the casual may be reassigned to a different unit depending on operational needs.

As you may be aware, the [Government of Canada has recommended against all non-essential travel](#) outside of Canada, including to the United States. We have received direction for new provincial guidelines for health care workers returning from travel outside of Canada.

If you are a health care worker providing direct patient care (e.g. physicians, nurses, care aides, etc.), and you are essential to ongoing health care provision. As such:

- You are not required to stay home for 14 days upon returning home from travel outside of Canada, unless you are returning from Hubei province in China, Iran, or Italy, as defined by the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- You are able to return to work following your return to Canada and asked to wear a mask and self-monitor for symptoms. We know this is an update to previous guidance; please see [this letter](#) for further information, where Dr. Bonnie Henry provides more clarity on self-isolation.
- If you have onset of symptoms, you are asked to put on a mask, safely transition the care of your patients, go home and self-isolate.

For any other PHC staff:

- You are required to self-isolate from work for 14 days upon your return to Canada and will be able to work from home during this period.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR MEDICAL STAFF

Doctors of British Columbia has provided an update on the Physician Disability Insurance and Quarantine Income Replacement programs. If physicians are required to enter into quarantine, whether due to illness or possible exposure to COVID-19, they will be covered through the government-funded Physician Disability Insurance, provided they are already enrolled in the plan. To be eligible for this coverage, they will need an Attending Physician Statement (APS) confirming the circumstances of the exposure.

[Read more about the Quarantine Income Replacement program for medical staff.](#)

Please decrease the frequency of testing of routine viral loads

Medical staff are asked to please refrain from ordering routine, non-essential and non-urgent viral load tests for HBV, EBV, BK and HIV so the labs can focus on testing clinical samples for COVID-19. This need may continue for the next two to three months.

Where can PHC Medical Staff get COVID-19 updates?

Providence physicians / medical staff can access a single source of official information relating to their work and COVID-19 at the following web pages. Please check back frequently as information is continually updated.

- [Ongoing updates >](#)
- [Q & A for Medical Staff >](#)

TOP QUESTIONS FROM PHC STAFF TODAY

1) When do I know if I should self-isolate?

If you are a health care worker providing direct patient care (e.g. physicians, nurses, care aides, etc.), and you are essential to ongoing health care provision. As such:

- You are not required to stay home for 14 days upon returning home from travel outside of Canada, unless you are returning from Hubei province in China, Iran, or Italy, as defined by the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- You are able to return to work following your return to Canada and asked to wear a mask and self-monitor for symptoms. We know this is an update to previous guidance; please see [this letter](#) for further information, where Dr. Bonnie Henry provides more clarity on self-isolation.
- If you have onset of symptoms, you are asked to put on a mask, safely transition the care of your patients, go home and self-isolate.

For any other PHC staff:

- You are required to self-isolate from work for 14 days upon your return to Canada and will be able to work from home during this period.

If a health care worker develops symptoms, they should self-isolate and contact the regional medical health officer for Vancouver Coastal Health at 1-604-527-4893.

If a health care provider develops symptoms while providing care, they should immediately put on a mask and finish any essential services they are providing before self-isolating.

Employees may not unilaterally choose to self-isolate.

2) I've been instructed by a Medical Health Officer to self-isolate but I don't have any symptoms. Is this considered sick leave?

Although no symptoms are present, if a Medical Health Officer has instructed you to not come into work, stay home and self-isolate. PHC will code this time as paid general leave.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES

PHC staff and medical staff COVID-19 testing

At SPH and MSJ EDs, testing is available to all PHC staff, medical staff, researchers, volunteers, as well as support staff and contract providers who work at PHC, including security, housekeeping, residents, medical students, contract providers, and other support workers.

Which health care workers should get testing?

Staff with such symptoms as fever +/- cough or shortness of breath, or the presence of two of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea, fatigue, nausea/vomiting, fatigue, malaise, muscle pain) should get tested. Note that there does not need to be a travel history or a history of contact with a known case. **Asymptomatic staff will NOT be tested.**

How do I access COVID-19 testing?

Symptomatic health care workers should present to the SPH or MSJ Emergency Departments, and identify themselves as health care workers. The ED will triage you CTAS Level 2, and they will identify you as a health care worker on the test order entry in Cerner to enable the virology laboratory to prioritize your testing. A handout will be provided for you in the ED regarding self-isolation.

What is the expected turn-around time?

The expected turn-around time is within **24 hours**. At a minimum, two runs per day are performed, approximately at 8am and 2pm. This means that expected results for each run will be around 12-1pm for the morning run, and 6-7pm for the afternoon run. However, this is subject to frequent change as the volume of requests significantly increases.

What should I do while awaiting test results?

Until you are contacted with the test result, you are advised to self-isolate at home as directed in the handout.

How will I find out the results of my COVID-19 testing?

After each COVID-19 PCR run is completed in the SPH Virology Laboratory, a Medical Microbiologist will review the run and directly call you with the results. Ensure that your contact information is up to date when you are assessed in the ED. If you have waited longer than 36 hours and have not heard about your results, you may call 1-833-707-2792 (M-F 8:30am – 4:30pm) for the results. Do NOT call the ED to ask for your result.

Delayed results may occur because the specimen was not flagged on order entry, timing of NP swab collection relative to the testing time cut-offs, or increased testing volumes encountered in virology. Please note that if your swab was not collected at SPH or MSJ, the sample may have been directed to another laboratory which tests for COVID-19 (such as the BCCDC or VGH), and the PHC Medical Microbiologist will not be able to coordinate or prioritize your testing.

REGIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (EOC)

A regional emergency operations centre (EOC) has been activated and PHC will also increase the frequency of our COVID-19 bulletin for our employees, medical staff, researchers, volunteers, board of directors and union leaders across in order to share critical and timely information. This daily bulletin will be shared each day, seven days a week.

The bulletin will also be available on the [PHC COVID-19 website](#). This website will be updated daily (sometimes hourly) and is accessible from work and home on your mobile or desktop devices. Please review the COVID-19 website often to ensure you have the most up to date information or consult your leader if you have concerns or identify discrepancies.

Click on the links below to view the organizational structures of the regional and local COVID-19 EOCs:

- [COVID-19 VCH-PHC Regional EOC](#)
- [COVID-19 Vancouver Acute EOC](#)
- [COVID-19 Vancouver Community EOC](#)
- [COVID-19 Coastal EOC](#)
- [COVID-19 Richmond EOC](#)
- [COVID-19 Providence Health Care \(PHC\) EOC](#)

QUESTIONS?

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