

COVID-19

Directive #4 for Ambulance Services and Paramedics under the Ambulance Act – Revised December 21 2021

THIS DIRECTIVE REPLACES THE DIRECTIVE #4 ISSUED ON MARCH 24, 2020. THE DIRECTIVE #4 ISSUED ON MARCH 24, 2020 IS REVOKED AND THE FOLLOWING SUBSTITUTED:

Issued under Section 77.7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA), R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7

WHEREAS under section 77.7(1) of the HPPA, if the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) is of the opinion that there exists or there may exist an immediate risk to the health of persons anywhere in Ontario, he or she may issue a directive to any health care provider or health care entity respecting precautions and procedures to be followed to protect the health of persons anywhere in Ontario;

AND WHEREAS, under section 77.7(2) of the HPPA, for the purposes of section 77.7(1), the CMOH must consider the precautionary principle where in the opinion of the CMOH there exists or there may exist an outbreak of an infectious or communicable disease and the proposed directive relates to worker health and safety in the use of any protective clothing, equipment or device;

AND HAVING REGARD TO the emerging evidence about the ways this virus transmits between people as well as the potential severity of illness it causes in addition to the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 that COVID-19 is a pandemic virus and the spread of COVID-19 in Ontario, and the Technical Brief "[Updated IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19](#)" dated December 15 2021 as amended from time to time which has been prepared by Public Health Ontario.

AND HAVING REGARD TO the need to take interim steps to optimize protection and to take a precautionary approach for the emerging and more transmissible COVID-19 Omicron variant of concern (B.1.1.529) in light of the uncertainty around the mechanisms for increased transmissibility for this variant and of its rapid replacement of previous variants of the COVID-19 virus in Ontario.

AND HAVING REGARD TO the precautionary principle, which in my opinion has been met, in that this directive will protect health care workers' health and safety in the use of any protective clothing, equipment and device and the failure to adhere to this directive may put worker health and safety at risk;

I AM THEREFORE OF THE OPINION that there exists or may exist an immediate risk to the health of persons anywhere in Ontario from COVID-19;

AND DIRECT pursuant to the provisions of section 77.7 of the HPPA that:

COVID-19 #4 for Ambulance Services and Paramedics under the Ambulance Act

Date of Issuance: December 21, 2021

Effective Date of Implementation: December 22, 2021

Issued To: Ambulance Services and paramedics within the meaning of the *Ambulance Act* and paramedics referenced in section 77.7(6), paragraphs 7 and 8 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*.

Introduction:

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV), and COVID-19. A novel coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) [was informed](#) of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China. A novel coronavirus (COVID-19) [was identified](#) as the causative agent by Chinese authorities on January 7, 2020.

On March 11, 2020 the WHO announced that COVID-19 is classified as a [pandemic](#). This is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus.

On March 17, 2020 the Premier and Cabinet declared an emergency in Ontario under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ontario and Cabinet made emergency orders to implement my recommendations of March 16, 2020.

On March 24, 2020 a Directive was issued to Ambulance Services and Paramedics under the Ambulance Act requiring surgical masks to be used for suspected COVID-19 patients and fluid-resistant N95 respirators to be used for aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMPs). In addition, based on a point of care risk assessment, it may be appropriate to use N95 respirators for situations other than COVID-19. That Directive is revoked and is replaced by this Directive.

On November 28 2021, the first case of the more transmissible Omicron variant of concern (B.1.1.529) was detected in Ontario. There is emerging evidence of community spread of the Omicron variant and it is rapidly increasing daily case counts of COVID-19 in Ontario.

Related Directives

On December 17, 2021, I issued a Directive on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Directive #1) which directed the required precautions for the provision of direct care to, or interactions with patients with suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19, and precautions when aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMPs) are planned or anticipated on patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. That Directive was revoked and replaced with Directive #1 dated December 21 2021.

To the extent that anything in this Directive conflicts with Directive #1, this Directive prevails.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms range from mild – like the flu and other common respiratory infections – to severe, and can include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing

Complications from COVID-19 can include serious conditions, like pneumonia or kidney failure, and in some cases, death.

Required Precautions

- A point-of-care risk assessment (PCRA) must be performed by every health care worker before every patient interaction.
- As an interim precaution in light of the uncertainty around the mechanisms of transmission of the COVID-19 Omicron variant of concern (B.1.1.529), required precautions for all health care workers providing direct care to or interacting with a suspected, probable (i.e. placed in precautions as high risk contact, in an outbreak zone of the facility or recently transferred from a facility in outbreak) or confirmed cases of COVID-19 are a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator (or approved equivalent), eye protection (goggles or face shield), gown and gloves.
- If a patient suspected of COVID-19 is anticipated to require a necessary aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP), paramedics should change into an N95 respirator.
- Based on a point of care risk assessment, it may be appropriate to use N95 respirators for situations other than COVID-19.

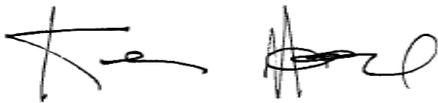
Note: The guidance outlined in this directive is an interim change in current practices respecting COVID-19 based on uncertainty around the modes of transmission of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus and the spectrum of illness that it causes. It has been made in close consultation with Public Health Ontario and I have considered the Precautionary Principle in issuing this directive.

As this outbreak evolves, there will be continual review of emerging evidence to understand the most appropriate measures to take. This will continue to be done in collaboration with health system partners and technical experts from Public Health Ontario and with the health system.

Questions

Hospitals and health care workers may contact the Ministry of Health by email at emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca with questions or concerns about this Directive.

Hospitals and health care workers are also required to comply with applicable provisions of the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) and its Regulations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kieran Moore', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kieran Moore, MD CCFP(EM), FCFP, MPH, DTM&H, FRCPC, FCAHS
Chief Medical Officer of Health