

Ministry of Health

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February 24, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Health System Organizations and Providers

SUBJECT: Update on COVID-19 Planning and Actions

This week, the Health Coordination Table focused on the following key actions to enable Ontario's health care system to effectively respond to COVID-19:

- **Monitoring the transmission of COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOC) cases based on sequencing of all positive results.**
 - The incidence of known VOC cases in Ontario was presented based on recent testing and screening data. Case and contact management for identified VOC cases have started to report data on sources of transmission to identify potential outbreaks and prevent continued spread.
- **Reviewed new evidence and updated recommendations on the use of medical and non-medical masks within health care and public settings.**
 - Public Health Ontario presented the Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee's (PIDAC) review of the recommendations on the use of N95 and multi-layer masks within health care settings based on the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The review advised no changes to the current PIDAC recommendations for the use of N95 respirators for health care workers. In addition, multi-masking and altering masks from their original state are not recommended in health care settings.
 - The Public Health Measures Table also provided updated advice for the use of non-medical masks in Ontario. Advice included reinforcement of communications to the public that masks do not replace, and should be used alongside, other personal and population health measures and that proper fit is critical in its effectiveness. In addition, it is recommended that non-medical masks be made of two or three layers of different materials, while ensuring breathing is not impeded.

- **Expanding additional hospital beds and health and human resources to support ongoing pressures in the health system.**
 - The ministry is actively monitoring the implementation of additional acute and critical care capacity as it is brought online across the province as part of the Fall Preparedness Plan. Furthermore, the ministry is continuing to deploy pandemic surge critical care and high intensity medicine beds to manage COVID-related hospital pressures. In order to support post-pandemic critical care pressures, the ministry is exploring options to stabilize critical care capacity in Ontario in collaboration with sector partners.
 - The ministry continues to monitor recruitment efforts to bridge health workforce gaps and that much needed resources are deployed to key sectors. In addition, broader work is underway to consider stabilization of health and human resource capacity post-pandemic.
 - The Table also received an update on the ministry's efforts in supporting public health units in planning and staffing for COVID-19 mass immunization clinics, leveraging the Ontario Matching Portal to recruit for vaccine administration personnel.
- **Reviewed the most recent scientific evidence and modelling to inform advice to government on the ongoing pandemic response.**
 - The Ontario COVID-19 Behavioural Science Working Group presented new evidence and strategies to support vaccine confidence and uptake amongst health care workers. The ministry is considering this information as it develops communications for the vaccine roll out.
 - The Science Advisory and Modelling Consensus Tables presented the latest COVID-19 case projections, trends, and the anticipated impact on public health and health system capacity.

We thank you for your continued work to respond to the pandemic and implement a phased recovery.

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

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