

May 5, 2021

**MEMORANDUM TO: Health System Organizations and Providers**

**SUBJECT: Update on COVID-19 Planning and Actions**

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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:

- **Expanding and evaluating the primary care-led COVID@Home program for treating COVID-19 patients at home.**
  - The COVID@Home program provides patients with COVID-19, who have either mild-to-moderate symptoms and/or are transitioning from hospital, the ability to be monitored at home by a team of health professionals.
  - The ministry is working in collaboration with primary care providers and Ontario Health to continue to supply oxygen saturation monitors to support the expansion of the program.
  - In addition, early evaluation results of the program identify the indicators of success include the clear clinical pathways and the establishment of 'communities of practice' to share ideas, best practices and provide ongoing support.
  
- **Continuing efforts to augment hospital capacity and redeployment efforts to manage the demand for Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds and Health Human Resources (HHR).**
  - The ministry, in collaboration with Ontario Health and system partners, is continuing to manage patient flow and increase ICU capacity through recent directives issued to facilitate transfers of patients to other hospitals, long-term care or retirement homes.
  - The ministry is enabling the redeployment of physician residents to hospitals in need of HHR – redeployment dependent on their level of specialty. This is addition to the redeployment of staff from Ontario Health, Home and Community Care Support Services and surgical units. The ministry is also maintaining efforts interprovincially and federally to source specialized critical care staff to support hospitals in Ontario.

- **Understanding the transmission and severity of the emerging variants B.1.617 and P.1. in Ontario.**
  - Public Health Ontario presented current evidence on the variants B.1.617 and P.1, that have been identified in Ontario. The early epidemiological data indicates that there may be implications regarding transmissibility and vaccine effectiveness, however further investigation is underway.
  
- **Mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in the retirement sector through the ongoing implementation of prevention, monitoring and supportive strategies.**
  - The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) provided an update on the ongoing pandemic efforts to increase vaccine uptake in residents, staff and essential caregivers. In addition, in collaboration with the ministry, MSAA is actively supporting testing and screening efforts in the sector through the Provincial Antigen Screening program to monitor for potential outbreaks. To further strengthen resident care, MSAA will be focused on efforts to increase nursing and personal support care within the sector and further improve access to vaccines.
  
- **Reviewing the most recent scientific evidence to inform advice to government on the ongoing pandemic response.**
  - Additional information was presented on the risk of COVID-19 transmission in indoor compared to outdoor settings which continues to be analyzed and developed for consideration.

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

Sincerely,

*(original signed by)*

Helen Angus  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Health

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Ministry of Health

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