

**Friday, March 27, 2020**

### **A message from Northern Health**

In these challenging times, we want to take a moment to assure you we have been working diligently and tirelessly in coordination with the province and the country on a collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are not alone in this crisis. We are a part of a system that is working very hard to minimize the impact of the challenges we face. This begins with a role everyone has – **social distancing, avoiding mass gatherings, self-isolation where appropriate and hand hygiene** – please help be part of the solution!

We also want to assure you that local and regional preparations are well under way. Over the last few weeks we have been following the Provincial Health Officer's direction in implementing actions that will help keep people safe in their communities and create capacity in our hospitals by managing elective procedures and prioritizing urgent care. In addition, we are working on Phase Three planning, which fully focuses on critical care, acute care, patient transportation, and health human resource planning. We are nearing completion of those plans over the next week.

Our staff are on the front lines, from housekeepers through to nurses, as well as physicians. Above all, we ask you to stay calm, react only to factual information, and follow our Public Health Orders from Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. We have attached a community guide. It provides more details on the planning work we are doing, as well as information and resources to assist you. We will continue to keep you updated through weekly updates, as well as through social media, the web, and other public communications.

Thanking you in advance for your continued cooperation

Sincerely,

**Colleen Nyce**  
NH Board Chair

**Cathy Ulrich**  
CEO

**Raina Fumerton**  
Chief Medical Health Officer  
(Acting)

### **Provincial case counts and statement**

- **As of March 26, 2020**, there were **11** confirmed COVID-19 cases in NH.
- **Province of BC statistics:**
  - Confirmed cases: **725** (**66** new cases)
  - Deaths: **14** (**0** new)
  - In hospital: **66** (**26** in ICU)
  - Recovered: **186**
- [Joint statement on Province of B.C.'s COVID-19 response](#) – March 26, 2020.

## New booklet available for communities

Northern Health has created a new booklet for communities to download and distribute: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): A Northern Health Guide for Your Community contains](#) all the information you need to help keep your community safe and well informed. It will be updated regularly online.

## How is Northern Health responding to the COVID-19 outbreak?

Over the last few weeks, we have been following the Provincial Health Officer's direction in implementing actions that will help keep people safe in their communities. We have created capacity in our hospitals by managing elective surgical procedures and prioritizing urgent care. This has opened up space in our hospitals as we prepare for people who may require hospitalization. In addition, we are working on Phase Three planning, which focuses on critical care, acute care, patient transportation, and health human resource planning. We are nearing completion of those plans. Operational planning also includes, province-wide, 17 "primary COVID" hospital care sites, while also planning to use as needed all hospital sites to meet demand.

NH is part of a provincial and national system that includes effective patient transportation systems when needed. This work also includes a focused approach in putting in place, with their clinical and support staff, a four- to six-week staffing schedule that redeploys staff as necessary to provide for the critical care needs required. In addition, as part of the preparation, we are managing our critical care inventory, including ventilators. Additional ventilators have been ordered, some have arrived provincially, and they will be deployed appropriately and where the need is. This is in addition to stock that has been/is undergoing refurbishment.

More details on Northern Health's outbreak response:

### Phases 1 and 2: Complete

- Created acute care capacity and acute care utilization teams
- Established 1-844-645-7811 line and virtual clinic
- Created more capacity in surgical, ambulatory care, medical imaging and lab
- Closed adult care centres and postponed respite care (care plans being updated)
- Shifted visitor policy
- Completed policy on working remotely
- Completed inventory of non-clinical staff who could be redeployed
- Reviewed pharmacy process, protocols, and business continuity
- Developed algorithms for emergency departments
- Established patient transport office 24/7, and associated protocols
- Updated protocols for kidney, cancer and cardiac care
- Developed protocols for contact tracing, case management ,and self-monitoring

- Completed initial round of public materials and messaging, including daily staff digests, daily physician updates, weekly leadership memos, and weekly stakeholder updates
- Updated environmental cleaning
- Reassessed protocols for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Held tabletop exercises for emergency department presentations and inpatient admissions
- Inventoried capacity for acute care and long-term care

### **Phases 2 and 3: Currently under way**

- Shifting to essential community services
- Creating public health response teams
- Reviewing ground transport
- Assessing rapid laboratory testing options for the Northwest
- Bolstering patient transport capacity
- Stabilizing supply chain for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Modeling to inform ventilator distributions
- Forming local emergency operations committees
- Finalizing critical care plan for implementation – intubation, ventilation, negative pressure rooms, locations
- Creating inpatient areas to cohort those with respiratory symptoms
- Establishing separate emergency room triage areas for those with respiratory symptoms
- Establishing critical care clinical consultation and support team with clear process for accessing service
- Finalizing COVID-19 ethics framework and consultation service

### **Information for natural resource industries, camps, construction, and more**

The province is expected to release guidelines for industrial camps in response to COVID-19 within the next few days. They will be posted on the BCCDC [webpage](#) when available; operators are encouraged to check this website regularly (daily).

**Industry:** We recognize that industrial camps provide an environment that can foster the transmission of infections from person to person. NH has been and continues to contact camps and projects across the region, to discuss infection prevention and control measures that can be taken by industrial camps in response to COVID-19. This includes (but is not limited to): cleaning and sanitation procedures, handwashing stations, protocols for responding to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19, social distancing measures, food handling, workforce screening, and plans to minimize travel and scale down workforces

**Construction:** Employers in the construction industry have been asking for clarity regarding what recent orders by the Provincial Health Officer mean for them. On March 22, the Province of BC issued an information bulletin providing [guidance to construction sites operating during COVID-19](#). The updated guidance clarifies that the order prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people **does not currently apply** to construction sites as a whole.

Rather, the Public Health Officer is directing employers to take all necessary precautions to minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission and illness to themselves and their employees. This includes limiting gatherings to less than 50 people in the same space in any circumstances, maintaining a distance of 2 metres between employees where possible, **reducing** in-person meetings, increasing handwashing stations, cleaning common areas and surfaces daily, and ensuring anyone with COVID-19 symptoms self-isolates at home for 14 days.

## Physical distancing

Together, we can slow the spread of COVID-19 by keeping a physical distance between each other. **Physical distancing is the most effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19.**

Physical distancing saves lives by reducing the chance you will become infected. It also slows the spread of infection over a longer period of time, so Northern Health has a better chance of keeping up. It's everyone's responsibility to practice social distancing, whether you have symptoms or not.

- **Avoid close contact with other people.** Keep at least 2 meters (6 feet) away from them.
- **Avoid public transport** – buses, taxis, ride-sharing.
- **Work from home** – speak to your employer about this.
- **Avoid social activities** such as going to cafes, pubs, restaurants, or movie theaters.
- **Avoid events** with groups of more than 50 people.
- **Avoid going on children's playdates**, such as going to a playground or park.
- **Don't have visitors to your home.** This includes friends and family (other than the family members you live with).
- **Don't go to your doctor's office without phoning ahead.**
  - a. If you have questions, call your family doctor or nurse practitioner
- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water– for at least 20 seconds.
- **Always wash your hands** when you get home or arrive at work.
  - a. If soap and water are unavailable, **use hand sanitizer**
- **Cough or sneeze into your elbow, or into a tissue**
  - a. **Put used tissues in the garbage immediately**, and then **wash your hands**
- **Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth**

## Changes to access for community facilities

You may have noticed that there have been changes to the layout of the hospital or other NH facility in your community, and the flow of people within them. As part of COVID-19 preparations, visitor restrictions will limit the number of people on site. If it's appropriate for you to be on site, please watch for new signage on how to navigate services and restricted areas.

### Self-assessment app now available

The **BC COVID-19 Support** app is now available on the Apple App Store and Google Play (for Android).

You can self-assess for COVID-19, and the app will also send you the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts.

Also, BC has a self-assessment website -- [bc.thrive.health](https://bc.thrive.health) -- to help people decide whether they need assessment or testing.

### Trusted links and resources

- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [HealthLink BC FAQ](#)
- [WHO FAQ](#)
- [Health Canada FAQ](#)
- WorkSafe BC - [COVID-19 information and resources](#)
- Northern Health COVID-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: **1-844-645-7811**
- For **non-medical info**, call **1-888-COVID19 / 1-888-268-4319** 7 days, 7:30 am - 8 pm

For current information on restrictions on travel, gatherings and other issues, see the [Provincial Health Officer's webpage on current health topics](#). This page has links to the latest joint statements and orders issued by the Provincial Health Officer and a link to the Government of Canada's travel advice and advisories.