



Ontario Health

To: Health System Partners
From: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Subject: February 3, 2021 — Update #8 Health System COVID-19 Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven itself a marathon, not a sprint. On behalf of Ontario Health, I want to acknowledge our many frontline health care workers and those who support them who are feeling the strain.

I also want to take this opportunity to share with you some of the work we are doing together and to thank everyone across Ontario's health care system for the tremendous dedication you have shown since this pandemic began. The challenges you are facing are in the midst of tremendous stress, personal sacrifice and loss. Thank you for your unwavering determination and continued efforts.

COVID-19 Testing

Result turnaround times have improved and are holding steady. As of Feb. 1, the seven-day average provincial turnaround time stood at 91.8% within two days, with eight public health units completing more than 95% of tests within two days. Ongoing monitoring and adjustments continue to improve turnaround times where isolated local challenges exist.

Since April, Ontario also has increased COVID-19 testing from roughly 4,000 tests daily to a current seven-day average of 50,900. To date, more than 9.7 million tests have been completed, the highest rate of testing of any province in Canada.

Plus, lab automation is well underway, reducing the need for manual data entry and improving efficiency and accuracy.

There are now 171 assessment centres across Ontario supported by 48 hospital, public health, and community laboratories to process specimens, and 213 pharmacies testing eligible, asymptomatic individuals. Pop-up and mobile testing sites continue to be deployed to target vulnerable and at-risk populations, including people who are experiencing homelessness.

Positive COVID-19 tests are being screened for known variants of concern (VOCs) in Ontario. In addition, Public Health Ontario and a consortium of laboratories are performing genome sequencing on a portion of all positive samples to identify emerging VOCs for early identification and mitigation.

Ontario Health is also supporting the rollout of rapid antigen tests for screening in long-term care homes, retirement homes, and select workplaces. Plus, rapid testing is underway at hospitals across the

province and in Indigenous communities using molecular rapid testing, which supports early identification and management of outbreaks.

Supply Chain and Critical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Ontario Health continues to work with the government to meet COVID-19 supply chain needs. To date, this work has focused on ventilators, beds, PPE, ICU supplies, and both testing and vaccine-related capital and supplies. Some highlights:

- The Ontario Health regions have shipped more than 100 million units of PPE and swab kits to more than 5,900 health service organizations across Ontario.
- Ontario Health continues to work with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade on ensuring ongoing supply of N95 respirators, as Ontario moves from largely imported product to domestic 3M production in Brockville, slated to go online in April 2021.
- Ontario Health worked with the Ministry of Health to provide 2.3 million reusable gowns to support Ontario hospitals. These gowns, which can be washed and reused approximately 50 times, represent the equivalent of approximately 115 million disposable gowns for hospitals as they manage through the pandemic.

Optimizing Hospital Capacity

With rising COVID-19-related hospitalizations, Ontario Health has directed hospitals to work as a single, seamless system. Working with their Ontario Health regional COVID response table or Incident Management System, they are accepting patients from within and outside their regions, sharing resources, and prioritizing care to both COVID-19 and non-COVID patients alike.

Thanks to the collaboration, commitment, and communication across hospitals, more than 800 transfers have taken place since late November. This very important work continues.

With the Ministry of Health and others, we also are actively working to identify additional capacity and appropriate health human resources actions and models of care, while supporting hospitals in the management of non-COVID surgical volumes.

Long-Term Care

Ontario Health regions are working across the province to provide comprehensive support to long-term care homes to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and stabilize care for residents by:

- Identifying hospital partners for long-term care homes.
- Supporting critical staffing to help care for residents, including deploying Ontario Health / Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) staff while seeking other staffing arrangements.
- Infection prevention and control by providing or supporting:
 - Assessment
 - Training, including PPE procedures
 - Environmental cleaning

Ontario Health, in consultation with key stakeholders including the Ministry of Long-Term Care, Public Health Ontario and the Ontario Long Term Care Association, has also developed Provincial Long-Term Care Home COVID-19 Outbreak Standard Operating Procedures. The Standard Operating Procedures recognize the need for continued vigilance and proactive measures to both prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care homes and effectively manage them as early as possible when they occur.

Virtual Care

The province continues to encourage primary care providers and physicians to use virtual care whenever clinically appropriate to help minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19. In addition to [remote care monitoring](#) for at-risk COVID-19 patients who do not require immediate hospitalization, virtual care is also being used to [support long-term care homes](#), [mental health and addictions](#), [emergency services](#) and for optimizing [non-urgent surgeries](#) during the pandemic.

In partnership with the Virtual Care Secretariat, there currently are:

- 38 COVID-19 remote care monitoring programs in place,
- 14 virtual emergency departments open, and
- 23 hospitals using virtual care for appropriate pre- and post-op patients.

Black Health Plan Working Group

Among our many efforts to support at-risk and high-priority communities across the province, Ontario Health has convened a working group to develop a cohesive Black Health Plan on improving equity during the pandemic and beyond. The focus is:

- COVID-19 vaccination
- Testing and support
- Longer-term pandemic recovery measures
- Mechanisms to hold organizations accountable for providing services to Black communities
- Addressing systemic issues and anti-Black racism in the health care system

Partners on the initiative include the Wellesley Institute and Black Health Alliance.

Together we have made important strides while the challenges of this pandemic continue with many twists and turns. With your ongoing efforts, we will continue to confront COVID-19. Thank you for all that you are doing to care for Ontarians and to keep them safe and healthy.

Matthew Anderson