



# Ontario Health

To: Health System Partners  
From: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health  
SUBJECT: August 19, 2020 — Update #7: Health System COVID-19 Pandemic Response

There have been encouraging developments in Ontario's efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19. Services, public spaces, and businesses across the province have begun to reopen, with all regions in Stage 3 as of August 12, 2020.

Together, with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care, we have all made significant strides against COVID-19. Thank you to everyone across the health care system for the very hard work that has brought us to where we are today. While the numbers continue to fluctuate, we do see a steady decline in people hospitalized and in intensive care units across the province.

Meanwhile, active work continues to address COVID-19 and to plan for a potential second wave during flu season.

## **COVID-19 lessons learned**

- We recently conducted a qualitative survey with 1,000+ health system stakeholders to gather lessons learned about Ontario Health's COVID-19 response to-date, and to inform preparedness planning for the Fall.
- We also collaborated with the Ministry of Health on a series of focus groups with stakeholders across Ontario to assess what worked well and to identify future opportunities.
- Throughout, we noted several opportunities that are currently informing our planning, including clarity of roles and responsibilities of Ontario Health and health system partners, building on the regional response structures established in wave one, and an ongoing focus on vulnerable populations and key partnerships to support coordinated outbreak management.

## **Planning for a possible COVID-19 second wave**

- With the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long-Term Care, and our health system partners across the province, planning is underway for potential subsequent waves of COVID-19 coinciding with flu season.

- As part of our planning, Ontario Health regions, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, are undertaking tabletop scenario planning with their local partners to further strengthen regional readiness in key areas.

### **Updates on personal protective equipment**

- Thanks to the ongoing work of the Ontario Health COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Committee, which actively reviews all emerging evidence on the use of PPE during COVID-19, we have updated versions of our COVID-19 recommendations for [PPE use](#) and [optimization](#) to reflect current evidence and recent Ministry of Health guidance on masking.
- We also are reminding hospitals to continue to store used N95 respirators for possible reprocessing, should they be required in the event of another COVID-19 surge.

### **Testing, Surveillance and Outbreak Management**

- Ontario's COVID-19 testing focuses on risk factors such as the amount of disease in the community, location of cases, positivity rate of tests, and rate of contagion.
- Testing at this time is targeting specific areas of outbreak and higher risk, while building testing capacity for a potential second COVID-19 surge if needed.
- The approach is focused on outbreak identification, containment and management, and includes testing at assessment centres, targeted testing in congregate settings (e.g. long-term care and retirement homes), and on-site testing in areas with high prevalence (such as farms).
- There are currently more than 140 Assessment Centres operating across Ontario that offer a combination of virtual, in-home, onsite, and drive-through assessment.
- Ontario Health is now developing participation agreements with Assessment Centres to enable them to continue to move forward under this model.
- In addition, participation agreements are underway for the labs that form the COVID-19 integrated provincial lab network of public, hospital, and private labs.
- Once processed, patients can access test results by contacting their family doctor; through the [provincial results viewer](#); or by contacting the assessment centre where the test took place.
  - The provincial results viewer was recently updated to support the federal government's [COVID Alert](#) app by providing a unique one-time alphanumeric key to individuals who test positive for COVID-19.
  - Users can then choose to enter this key into the app to anonymously notify others whom they may have been in contact with, without revealing the date or location of exposure.

- Public health also follows up immediately with patients who have positive test results, aided by a newly deployed case- and contact-management system that streamlines the case management process for COVID-19.
- The lab network is working toward increasing capacity in preparation for a possible surge, and potential outbreaks during the fall and winter.

### **Long-term care**

- The Ministry of Long-Term Care and Ontario Health have established a Long-Term Care Operations Committee to support regional tables and help guide and support preparedness planning, with sector input, including preparedness assessments of all long-term care homes.
- Preparedness assessments will focus on evidence-based measures for successful prevention, containment, and management of COVID-19, including:
  - Health human resources (e.g., leadership/management, clinical care, and staffing)
  - Infection prevention and control (e.g., standards, protocols, and processes)
  - Partnerships and operations (e.g., communications protocols, roles and responsibilities, as well as enhanced outbreak-management processes and protocols)

### **Virtual care**

- In partnership with the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health is continuing to work with partners to support virtual care delivery wherever possible and appropriate, including:
  - Support for both English and French services for Ontarians without access to a primary care provider at [seethedoctor.ca](https://seethedoctor.ca);
  - Expanding virtual care services with partners in emergency care, home and community care, mental health and addictions, pre-operative care, and long-term care; and
  - A pilot program offering technology for mental health supports in 18 school boards, and exploring further opportunities with the education sector.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone for your dedication and hard work. As we continue to collectively leverage best practices gleaned from our COVID-19 efforts to date, and continuously improve health system responsiveness, we can take great pride in our efforts. Together, we are strong and can continue to make a difference.

Matthew Anderson