

Memo

Date:
April 14, 2022

To: Health System Partners

From: Anna Greenberg, Chief Regional Officer, Toronto and East Regions
Brian Ktytor, Chief Regional Officer, North East and North West Regions
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CC: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO
Mark Walton, Senior Vice President, COVID-19 Pandemic Response
Dr. Chris Simpson, Executive Vice President, Medical

Re: Wave 6 – COVID-19: Optimizing Care – Operational Direction

Ontario is currently facing a surge of new COVID-19 infections. While we continue to prioritize health system recovery and resumption of care, we recognize the challenges that this new wave poses in our collective efforts to resume normal operations.

Based on our current projections, we do not anticipate the need for provincial-scale ramp down of services. However, we do expect significant regional variation and communities where higher volumes of patient transfers will be required to maintain access to care. In support of these transfers, all hospitals should consider implementing a policy that ensures patient consent to transfer is sought upon admission to hospital, if not already in place. Additionally, COVID-19-related sick calls are creating capacity issues across the health system. As a result, our regional and provincial incident management system (IMS) structures have resumed and will, once again, play an important role in ensuring a coordinated response.

With this in mind, we are sharing operational direction for the health system and ask that our partners in primary care, community support services, long-term care, hospitals, and home and community care support the directions outlined in the Optimizing Care document below.

All partners should continue to work regionally, with a view to ensuring our system response is highly integrated. We will be working actively with our IMS tables to provide support and guidance, ensuring that our efforts are coordinated, patient flow is prioritized, and together, we are able to provide the best possible care for all patients.

We recognize how challenging the past two years have been for all of you and your teams and are immensely grateful for your continued dedication. Thank you for all you have given personally and professionally to ensure patients in Ontario are able to get the care they need.

Operational Direction for Optimizing Care

Last updated: April 14, 2022

Health care system: staffing shortages in highest risk settings

- Organizations across the health system are experiencing staffing shortages that impact care to patients/residents. The Ministry of Health has updated [guidance](#) for early return to work options for health care workers that can be used routinely, and additional options for when there are critical staffing shortages impacting patient care.

Primary care

- Continue to focus on timely and comprehensive primary care to avoid unnecessary emergency department visits.
- Continue to optimize in-person care as appropriate.
- Continue preventative care (e.g., cancer screening).
- Undertake early identification and prescribing/referral for patients who would benefit from COVID-19 antiviral treatment to prevent severe illness (see [resources](#) from Ontario Health).
- Continue to support vaccination efforts, clinical assessment centres, and remote monitoring of patients with COVID-19.

Community support services

- Continue to support system recovery and response efforts by fully ramping up in-person programs and services as appropriate.
- Support system-level access and flow initiatives by maximizing care delivery in the community, including optimizing access to assisted and supportive living.
- Continue to support vaccination efforts and contributions to MEST/CREST team efforts as needed regionally.
- Undertake early identification and prescribing/referral for patients who would benefit from COVID-19 antiviral treatment to prevent severe illness (see [resources](#) from Ontario Health).

Long-term care and home care

- Continue to work closely with regional tables and system partners to facilitate access and flow, with a focus on ensuring care is provided in the most appropriate setting.
- Ensure timely access to long-term care assessment and safe admissions based on the regulatory framework, recognizing the immediate needs of community and hospital crisis-designated patients.

- Continue to work closely with local public health units to ensure a consistent approach to outbreak management across long term care homes and in alignment with updated Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care guidance.
- Continued contribution to MEST/CREST team efforts, as needed regionally and where there is sufficient capacity to do so.
- Undertake early identification and prescribing/referral for patients who would benefit from COVID-19 antiviral treatment to prevent severe illness (see [resources](#) from Ontario Health).

Hospitals

- All hospitals must remain ready to accept transfers within 24 to 48 hours as directed by the IMS or regional leadership tables/structures.
- Increases in surgical and procedural activity must not result in unsafe/unstable staffing in other areas of the hospital (e.g., medical/surgical wards, critical care).
- All hospitals must ensure an organizational policy is in place to address visitor and essential caregiver access, with a goal of achieving regional consistency in approach.
- All hospitals contributing to MEST/CREST team efforts continue as needed regionally, including continued support for IPAC hubs.
- All hospitals continue to support access to COVID-19 therapeutic treatments that can help prevent serious illness for both inpatients and outpatients (see [resources](#) from Ontario Health).