

COVID-19 Outbreak: Communications Toolkit For Congregate Living Environments

Developed in Collaboration with Trillium Health Partners, William Osler Health System, Markham Stouffville Hospital, Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre and Ontario Health Central Region

May 2020

Outline

This communications toolkit consists of the following information to support in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak or death(s):

- Process and Notifications
 - Web Updates
 - Media Relations
 - PHIPA Guidance
 - Key Messages
 - Examples and Additional Resources
-

Process and Notifications

Communications Cascade: Outbreak Declared

*Suggested order of stakeholder engagement

STAKEHOLDERS	TACTICS	RESPONSIBLE
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact Public Health unit to notify regarding outbreak	Congregate Living Home
Affected unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key messages for team huddle	Congregate Living Home
All staff and professional staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All user memo• Update to Intranet (for options, please refer to Web Updates section of this slide deck)• Signage	Congregate Living Home
Residents/Patients/Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident/Patient notification	Congregate Living Home
Elected officials notification (as required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email notification	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website update (for options, please refer to Web Updates section of this slide deck)	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home
Media (as required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactive media statement (if required)	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home

Please note: Recommendation is that stakeholders outlined here should be engaged in the order of the cascade an hour apart from each other. The intention is to disclose in a timely manner, started with communicating to those impact most, first and leader led.

Communications Cascade: Outbreak Declared Over

***Suggested order of stakeholder engagement**

STAKEHOLDERS	TACTICS	RESPONSIBLE
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact Public Health unit to notify regarding outbreak	Congregate Living Home
Affected unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key messages for team huddle	Congregate Living Home
All staff and professional staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All user memo• Update to Intranet (for options, please refer to Web Updates section of this slide deck)• Signage	Congregate Living Home
Residents/Patients/Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident/Patient notification	Congregate Living Home
Elected officials notification (as required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email notification	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website update (for options, please refer to Web Updates section of this slide deck)	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home
Media (as required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactive media statement (if required)	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home

Please note: Recommendation is that stakeholders outlined here should be engaged in the order of the cascade an hour apart from each other. The intention is to disclose in a timely manner, started with communicating to those impact most, first and leader led.

Communications Cascade: Patient/Resident Death(s) Due to Outbreak

***Suggested order of stakeholder engagement**

STAKEHOLDERS	TACTICS	RESPONSIBLE
Family of individual who passed away	Family notification, as per usual process	Congregate Living Home
Senior Leadership Team	Email - Notify of case and announcement to staff and public.	Congregate Living Home
Team (managing issue)	Huddle - Go over rollout to ensure alignment with leadership, affected unit/department	Congregate Living Home
Public Health	Formal notification	Congregate Living Home
Unit/department of individual who passed away	Huddle (while practicing physical distancing) - Program leadership to offer Employee and Family Assistance Program support (have Employee Health presence available)	Congregate Living Home
All staff and professional staff	Include a COVID-19 tracker section in a Weekly COVID-19 Bulletin (sent by email) that can provide staff with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total # of individuals with COVID-19 - Total # of staff with COVID-19 - Total # of deaths due to COVID-19 	Congregate Living Home

Communications Cascade: Patient/Resident Death(s) Due to Outbreak

***Suggested order of stakeholder engagement**

STAKEHOLDERS	TACTICS	RESPONSIBLE
Local elected officials	Weekly email update - include a link to the external website's dedicated outbreak page	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home
Media	Provide Public Health Unit with a quote to include in their news release (if applicable)	Public Health Unit or Congregate Living Home

Please note: Recommendation is that stakeholders outlined here should be engaged in the order of the cascade an hour apart from each other. The intention is to disclose in a timely manner, starting with communicating to those impacted most, first and leader led.

Web Updates

Web Updates: Outbreaks

Intranet Portal

Option 1:

- Consider having a dedicated 'Outbreak' section on your organization's intranet portal that can include the following:
 - An outbreak tracker including the number of people affected when the outbreak was declared and number of people affected when the outbreak was declared over
 - Messaging about how your organization is defining a COVID-19 outbreak
 - Steps your organization is taking to keep everyone safe
 - Steps your organization takes when an outbreak is declared

Option 2:

- Consider having a dedicated 'Outbreak' section on your organization's intranet portal that can include the following:
 - A link to your public health unit from where people can access your organization's outbreak information.
 - Steps your organization is taking to keep everyone safe
 - Steps your organization takes when an outbreak is declared

Web Updates: Outbreaks

External Website

Option 1:

- Consider having a dedicated 'Outbreak' section on your organization's external website that can include the following:
 - An outbreak tracker including the number of people affected when the outbreak was declared and number of people affected when the outbreak was declared over
 - Messaging about how your organization is defining a COVID-19 outbreak
 - Steps your organization is taking to keep everyone safe
 - Steps your organization takes when an outbreak is declared

Option 2:

- Consider having a dedicated 'Outbreak' section on your organization's external website that can include the following:
 - A link to your public health unit from where people can access your organization's outbreak information.
 - Steps your organization is taking to keep everyone safe
 - Steps your organization takes when an outbreak is declared

Media Relations

Media Relations Best Practices

When speaking with a reporter, please consider the following:

- Do your research: Find out as much information as possible about the reporter's story, if other organizations are being contacted, and what kind of stories the reporter may have done before
- Determine approach through either written statement, phone or taped interview. Each has pros and cons with a written statement being more controlled but an interview provides the opportunity to connect better with the audience
- Identify your spokesperson: Ensure your senior leadership is in agreement
- Prepare key messages and prep your spokesperson ahead of time
- Be responsive: Media are on deadline
- Be factual: Don't lie or share information that isn't finalized
- Be consistent: Think about what you have said before
- Be focused and careful: No matter how friendly a reporter may seem, stick to your key messages. There is no such thing as "off the record"
- Be helpful: Offer background information, photos, resources, etc.

PHIPA Guidelines

PHIPA Guidelines

What is the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)?

PHIPA is the Personal Health Information Protection Act and is Ontario legislation established in November 2004. *PHIPA* defines how personal health information (PHI) must be handled (collected, used and disclosed) by healthcare providers in Ontario.

What is Personal Health Information (PHI)?

Personal Health Information (PHI) is defined in *PHIPA* as identifying information relating to the physical or mental health of an individual, the provision of health care to an individual, the identification of the substitute decision-maker for the individual and the payments or eligibility of an individual for health care or coverage for health care, including the individual's health number. Below are some examples of PHI:

- Health Card Number (HCN)
- Medical Record Number (MRN)
- Health care history
- Family medical history
- Test results
- Diagnostic images

This list is not exhaustive. Your organization may have other types of personal health information in its custody or control, which may include information that is not recorded (e.g., a verbal disclosure). Also, if there is a reasonable expectation that an individual can be identified from the information disclosed (either alone or when combined with other information), such information will likely qualify as personal health information.

PHIPA Guidelines

What is a privacy breach?

A **Privacy Breach** is when PHI has been accessed, collected, used or disclosed in a manner which conflicts with the provisions of *PHIPA*, *FIPPA* and your organization's Privacy Policy. This includes when PHI is lost, stolen, or accessed by unauthorized persons. It also includes situations where PHI is copied, modified or disposed of without authority.

Are there exceptions to these guidelines?

In emergency and limited other situations, personal information, including personal health information, may need to be disclosed. The circumstances may include emergencies or critical situations affecting individuals or public health and safety, as well as situations calling for compassion. To learn more, please [click here](#).

Please note: As per PHIPA guidelines, consent is required from the resident or substitute decision maker to disclose any personal health information. To learn more, please visit the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario's [website](#).

Key Messages

Key messages for Staff: Outbreak

- **[insert number]** patients/residents and/or **[insert number]** of health care workers have tested positive for COVID-19 on **[insert unit/location]** between **[insert dates]**.
- At present, COVID-19 is prevalent in the community, but we are starting to see more staff to staff and **[insert type of congregate living environment]** transmissions. It is imperative that all staff and professional staff adhere to all infection control practices including hand hygiene, cleaning of shared equipment, appropriate use of personal protective equipment and physical distancing.
- Out of an abundance of caution, we will be implementing several measures including (for example):
 - Being closed to admissions
 - Patients/residents being placed on droplet/contact precautions
- If any staff or professional staff experience symptoms they must immediately report these to their leader.
- All assigned staff will be required to work on this unit and no other unit.
- These measures will have ongoing reassessment and will be in place until further notice.
- We will also be testing all patients/residents and Employee Health/Occupational Health will be in contact with the unit leadership in regard to staff testing. Testing is available to all staff on the unit.
- If a patient/resident tests positive, they will be moved to a dedicated COVID-19 unit. If they test negative, they will remain on the floor/in their rooms and be monitored for symptoms.
- If a staff member tests positive, they will be asked to self-isolate at home for 14 days. If they test negative, they will continue to work and will be asked to self-monitor for symptoms. Please be vigilant and do not come to work if you are feeling unwell.
- We need to take an innovative approach to contact tracing and testing to address this situation for the safety of our staff, patients/residents and all family members.
- To self-monitor you can:
 - Check your temperature two times a day
 - Monitor symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days
 - Maintain social distancing including on break (2 meters)
 - Wear PPE in patient care
 - Work in only one location

Key messages for Families Calling: Outbreak

- Between **[insert dates]** there were COVID-19 cases reported on **[insert location at organization name]**, and in consultation with Public Health, we have declared an outbreak.
- Through our investigation to date, we are aware of **[insert number of patients/residents and staff who tested positive]**.
- Those patients/residents have been safely relocated to **[insert location exclusive for COVID-19 patients/residents]**.
- These staff are in self-isolation at home for 14 days.
- We have taken immediate precautions to protect patients/residents and staff.
- All other patients/residents at **[insert location]** are being actively monitored for symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- Our top priority is the safety of patients/residents, our staff and the community.
- Please be assured, we are working closely with Public Health and taking every precaution in caring for patients/residents.
- Some of the precautionary measures we have taken to ensure patient safety include:
[insert measures]
- **[insert name of organization]** remains vigilant as we continue to see community spread of COVID-19.
- If you have questions about the care and safety of a loved one, please contact **[the patient care team/insert individual's name, title and contact information]**.

Key messages for Media: Outbreak

- Between [insert dates], [insert number] cases of COVID-19 were identified on [insert location/unit] at [insert site].
- The cases include [insert number of patients/residents/staff affected].
- In consultation with Public Health, an outbreak was declared.
- The current public health guideline for an outbreak is defined as when a unit has two or more patients who test positive for a respiratory illness (e.g. flu), acquired in hospital, within 48 hours.
- There is currently no formal guideline specific to a COVID-19 outbreak. In the absence of this, and in consultation with Public Health, we are defining a COVID-19 outbreak as [insert your definition].
- We continue to work with regional and provincial partners on a formal definition.
- Testing and monitoring of patients and staff is underway.
- We take outbreaks extremely seriously and have implemented several measures to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 and ensure the safety and of our staff and patients/residents. These include:
 - Closing outbreak units to any new admissions
 - Enhanced cleaning on these units, and increased training in the use of personal protective equipment, washing of hands and physical distancing
 - Immediate testing of all patients/residents on outbreak units regardless of symptoms
 - All patients/residents on affected units are put on Droplet/Contact Precautions
 - Increased Infection, Prevention and Control Measures for both staff and patients/residents
 - Immediate testing for any hospital staff, professional staff and patients/residents experiencing symptoms

Key messages for Leadership to Speak with Staff: COVID-19-related (first) Resident Death

- Today we are sharing **[insert name of organization]**'s first death in connection to COVID-19. Our collective thoughts are with the resident's family at this difficult time.
- The resident was **[insert high-level information that is in alignment with PHIPA and your organization's privacy policy]**
- We want to recognize the dedication of those involved in this resident's care and express our appreciation to our physicians and staff's for their continued commitment.
- We continue to work diligently to respond to COVID-19 and have implemented significant measures to further protect our residents and people including:
 - **[insert steps taken]**
- We recognize the pace of change related to COVID-19 can be overwhelming.
- Our staff and professional staff have been incredible, and we ask you continue to support each other.
- If you have questions or concerns, please raise it with your leader immediately.
- We are all here to support you.

Key messages for Media: COVID-19-related (first) Patient/Resident Death

- We are deeply saddened to share that on [insert date], a [insert organization's name] patient/resident passed away due to COVID-19.
- On behalf of our organization, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family during this difficult time.
- These are unprecedented times for our community.
- As we continue to see community spread of COVID-19, we remain vigilant and are actively taking measures to respond to additional COVID-19 cases and outbreaks.
- Our dedicated team will continue to take strong measures to protect our patients/residents, people and the community.
- Together, we will flatten the curve.

Key messages for Staff: Outbreak-related Staff Death

- It is with a heavy heart that we share the passing of a [insert name of organization] staff member due to COVID-19.
- Our collective thoughts are with the staff member's family, friends and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time.
- **[INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT THE STAFF MEMBER].**
- These are unprecedented, extraordinary times and we are so grateful for the continued efforts of each and every one of you.
- Please be assured that we will keep taking all the necessary precautionary measures to protect our people and patients/residents.
- We would also like to remind you that the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available to you.
- We are committed to continually keeping our staff informed and adapting our procedures and policies as COVID-19 situation evolves to ensure you are supported and you are safe.
- A joint media statement (TBD) will be issued shortly by **[name of organization]** and Peel Public Health.
- Should you have any questions or feedback, please speak with your leader.

Key messages for Media: Outbreak-related Staff Death

- It is with great sorrow that we share the passing of a **[insert name of organization]** staff member due to COVID-19.
- **[insert name of staff member if permitted by family and any other details about the staff member, as appropriate].**
- Our collective thoughts are with the staff member's family, friends and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time.

Examples and Additional Resources

Example: Outbreak Notification to Patient/Resident and Family

[INSERT DATE]

Dear Patient & Family,

Between **[insert dates]** there were COVID-19 cases reported on **[insert location at organization name]**, and in consultation with Public Health, we have declared an outbreak. Through our investigation to date, we are aware of **[insert number of cases and staff who tested positive]**.

Your safety is our top priority and we will be testing all patients/residents and staff on/in **[insert location]** regardless of symptoms. We have also taken a number of other measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure your safety and the safety of our staff. These include:

[insert measures being taken]

We understand that this is a time of increased anxiety for you and your family. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact **[insert an individual's name, title, and contact information]**.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

[sign off]

Example: Outbreak Declared Over - Notification to Patient/Resident and Family

[INSERT DATE]

Dear Patient & Family,

We are informing you that, in consultation with Public Health, the COVID-19 outbreak we reported on **[insert location and organization's name]** on **[insert date]** has been declared over.

Although the unit outbreak is over, your care team will continue to adhere to all infection control practices including:

- Physical distancing
- Appropriate use of personal protective equipment
- Increased hand hygiene
- Cleaning of shared equipment

As always, we are committed to your safety and well-being. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact **[insert name, title and contact information]**

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

[sign off]

Example: Trillium Health Partners' Website Update

COVID-19 cases at THP

as of April 21, 2020 10:30 a.m. (updated once daily)

Number of patients who have received a positive COVID-19 diagnosis at THP	854
Number of confirmed COVID-19 patients in hospital	96
Inpatient – other	71
Inpatient – critical care	25
Number of COVID-19 patients discharged	71

Example: Outbreak Memo

[insert number of patients/residents and/or health care workers] on [specify unit if applicable] at [insert name of organization/site] have tested positive for COVID-19 between [insert dates]. In consultation with Peel Public Health, we have declared an outbreak. These cases have been acquired from a number of sources, including community and hospital transmissions.

As COVID-19 is prevalent in the community, we are starting to see more staff to staff and hospital transmissions.

It is imperative that in addition to our usual practices, all staff and professional staff adhere to all infection control practices including:

- Physical distancing
- Appropriate use of personal protective equipment
- Hand hygiene
- Cleaning of shared equipment
- No shared food or eating in unit common spaces

We are implementing the following measures which include, but are not limited to:

[insert steps]

These protocols will be in place for minimum of 7 days then reassessed. If you have questions, please contact **[insert contact]**.

Example: Key Messages for Families Regarding Staff Testing Positive for COVID-19 at a Congregate Living Environment

- We want you to be aware that an employee at **[insert name of congregate living environment]** has tested positive for COVID-19.
- At no point did this employee work in the **[name of unit]**, which is a separated from the rest of the facility and has its own entrance. We follow rigorous infection prevention and control protocols.
- The employee who tested positive for COVID-19 is currently recovering at home in isolation and has not come into the **[insert type of congregate setting]** since developing symptoms **[insert time frame, e.g. last week]**.
- **[insert name of congregate setting]** has proactively tested staff and residents who may have been in contact with the healthcare worker. All test results were negative for COVID-19.
- Staff and residents continue to be closely monitored for symptoms and we are working closely with the Public Health Unit to trace the healthcare worker's movement throughout the facility. In an abundance of caution, public health has declared an outbreak at the **[insert type of congregate setting, e.g. senior's home]**.
- Again, we want to assure you that the safety of our residents and staff remains our highest priority. **[Insert name of congregate living environment]** implemented strict measures early-on in the pandemic to ensure all infection control protocols were in place to contain the spread of COVID-19 and continues to take all precautions necessary, including twice-daily temperature checks for all staff.
- We will continue to keep you informed of any further developments. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact **[insert name, title and contact information]**.

Example: Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre's News Release Regarding Staff Testing Positive for COVID-19

April 22, 2020

Staff member tests positive for COVID-19 at IOOF Seniors Homes

The IOOF Seniors Homes Inc. (Odd Fellow & Rebekah Long Term Care Home) in Barrie has received confirmation that an IOOF healthcare worker has tested positive for COVID-19.

The healthcare worker, with limited exposure to residents, is currently in isolation, recovering at home and has not come into the IOOF since developing symptoms late last week.

Employees, residents and their families were notified of the confirmed case and the IOOF proactively tested staff and residents who may have been in contact with the healthcare worker. All test results were negative for COVID-19. Staff and residents continue to be closely monitored for symptoms and the IOOF is working closely with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) to trace the healthcare worker's movement throughout the facility and in the community. In an abundance of caution, public health has declared an outbreak at the seniors home.

"The safety of our residents and staff remains our highest priority," says Garry Hopkins, IOOF CEO. "The IOOF implemented strict measures early-on in the pandemic to ensure all infection control protocols were in place to contain the spread of COVID-19. We want to assure residents and their families that we will continue to take all precautions necessary to keep them safe."

IOOF's comprehensive pandemic plan includes:

- Early implementation of a no visitor policy, with some exceptions
- Restricted entry and actively screening of all residents and staff twice a day, including temperature checks
- Enhanced cleaning throughout the facility, particularly high-touch areas
- Continuous monitoring of residents and appropriate isolation for any symptomatic residents
- Strict adherence to government directives and infection prevention and control practices
- Adequate supply and ongoing training for use of Personal Protective Equipment
- Daily monitoring and assessment by the Outbreak Management Team

IOOF will continue to closely monitor the situation while strictly following all safety precautions.

Example: Trillium Health Partners' Statement for Website and Social Media regarding first COVID-related patient death

Statement from Michelle DiEmanuele, President & CEO, Trillium Health Partners

On March 21, 2020, a patient being treated at Trillium Health Partners (THP) for COVID-19 passed away. On behalf of our entire hospital, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family and loved ones during this difficult time.

THP's highly trained staff care for respiratory illness every day and are prepared for communicable diseases such as COVID-19. These are extraordinary times for our community and country. The hospital is continually taking strong measures to protect our patients, people and the community. By continuing to work together, we will flatten the curve.



Example: William Osler Health System's Media Statement Regarding COVID-related Staff Death

Osler confirms passing of staff member with COVID-19

April 9, 2020, BRAMPTON

William Osler Health System is deeply saddened to announce the passing of a member of the Osler family, related to COVID-19. The health care worker, a long-time environmental services associate with Osler's Brampton Civic Hospital, was being cared for in Brampton Civic Hospital's Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Our entire organization is devastated by this news, and our thoughts and prayers are with the family at this difficult time.

Example: Trillium Health Partners' Media Response Regarding Outbreak

Question:

Your website is reporting 5 outbreaks at specific units at your hospitals, are you able to provide specific numbers for each of these units?

Response:

The current public health guideline for an outbreak is defined as when a unit has two or more patients who test positive for a respiratory illness (e.g. flu), acquired in hospital, within 48 hours. There is currently no formal guideline specific to a COVID-19 outbreak.

In the absence of this, and in consultation with Peel Public Health, we are using a more stringent definition for a COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically we are defining a COVID-19 outbreak as two or more patients and/or staff with confirmed COVID-19 identified within a five day period where there is a reasonable epidemiological link between the cases. We continue to work in partnership with the region and province on a formal definition and will continue to use the above definition in the interim.

Currently, there are five COVID-19 outbreaks that are in effect at THP. Please note that the numbers provided below are from when the respective outbreaks were declared.

Unit 4B Medicine at Mississauga Hospital (outbreak declared on April 9)

Seven health care workers on Unit 4B at Mississauga Hospital tested positive for COVID-19

Unit 3A Medicine at Mississauga Hospital (outbreak declared on April 11)

Three health care workers and a patient on Unit 3A at Mississauga Hospital tested positive for COVID-19

Unit 2D Mental Health at Credit Valley Hospital (outbreak declared on April 12)

Two patients on Unit 2D Mental Health at Credit Valley Hospital tested positive for COVID-19

Unit 1B Medicine at Credit Valley Hospital (outbreak declared on April 14)

Two patients and two health care workers on Unit 1B Medicine at Credit Valley Hospital tested positive for COVID-19

Unit 2B at Credit Valley Hospital (outbreak declared on April 18)

Six health care workers and three patients on Unit 2B at Credit Valley Hospital have tested positive for COVID-19

THP's top priority is the safety of our patients, people and the community. As we continue to see community spread of COVID-19, the hospital remains vigilant and is actively preparing measures to respond to additional COVID-19 cases and outbreaks. To learn more about the steps THP is taking to respond to COVID-19, please visit www.thp.ca.

General Social Media Tips for Staff

Think twice!

Please make sure you're posting in the spirit of your organization's vision, mission and values. A misinterpreted post, like or reply can negatively affect your reputation as well as your organization's.

Keep patient privacy in mind

Regardless of consent, patients cannot be in your own personal social media feed. If you would like to share a patient story, please contact your organization's communications team or lead who can advise on appropriate next steps.

You are more known than you think

Your affiliation to the hospital is just a quick search away on Google, LinkedIn or a regulatory college site like CPSO or CNO.

Be mindful of who/what you're tagging

DO recognize your team - tagging co-workers for a job well done or for sharing 'kudos' is a great use of social media.

DON'T tag journalists or politicians – your organization's communication team or lead should manage this.

Don't air dirty laundry

Feeling frustrated about an issue or co-worker at work makes us human. Talk to a colleague, your leader or a family member rather than posting work-related frustrations on social media.

Internal documents are meant to be internal

Our internally distributed policies, procedures and clinical guidance documents are **not** meant for social media conversations. Even posting snippets of these documents can result in misinterpretations.