



Service Planning and Clinical Services Expansion during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Key Messages and Potential Questions and Answers

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PURPOSE

This is a reference tool for staff and physicians to assist as you communicate with patients and their families/caregivers about changes to service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As clinical services gradually expand, many patients are having their care rescheduled while others will still be experiencing delays. The hospital is mandated to retain capacity for a potential surge in COVID-19 patients, and it will be sometime before we are back to pre-COVID volumes of care.

The messaging provided in this document can be used on phone calls, virtual care appointments or face-to-face visits when needed and appropriate. This includes answers for potential questions from patients, family members and caregivers. Please adjust the wording and information as needed.

*Refer patients to LHSC's website for the most current information:

www.lhsc.on.ca/coronavirus. This includes an online Family Information and Support Centre with resources, coping strategies and other support for patients and families.

*As needed, refer patients to LHSC's Patient Relations Office (519-685-8500 ext. 52036). They can facilitate compliments, complaints and conflicts. Contacting Patient Relations is the patient's choice and is optional.

*If the patient, family member or caregiver mentions calling the news media, please contact your leader immediately.

KEY MESSAGES

- Following provincial directives and regional approval, LHSC is moving forward with plans to gradually and carefully expand some clinical services that were paused during the pandemic. Prioritization of services is based on clinical evidence and need.
- The pandemic situation will keep evolving in Ontario. It is important that we strike a balance between slowly starting scheduled care and continuing to be ready for whatever COVID-19 might throw our way.
- Patients, families and caregivers coming to the hospital will have a different experience than they might anticipate. This includes screening at our doors, physical distancing measures, temporary visitation policies, and changes to some of our processes. Virtual care visits will be offered as much as possible.
- Our hospitals are safe and remain open for urgent and emergency care. In the case of an emergency, please call 911 or go to an Emergency Department.
- We recognize that changes in our service delivery cause uncertainty and worry for patients and their loved ones. Waiting for your care can be very difficult. All treatment decisions are being carefully reviewed by your health-care team and they will continue to monitor your care closely.
- Patients will be notified of opportunities to reschedule procedures and other appointments, including those who are waiting for surgeries. You will hear directly from your physician's office or other provider when your care can be rescheduled. Please reach out to them if you have concerns or changing symptoms.
- LHSC continues to take actions to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and keep people safe. The expansion plans are being regularly reviewed and additional services will resume when it is safe to do so.

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

General questions

What is COVID-19? What are the symptoms?

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the Novel Coronavirus which is a new respiratory virus. COVID-19 has been shown to cause a range of mild symptoms like runny nose, sore throat, cough and fever. For some, it can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. Older people and people with pre-existing medical conditions seem to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with this virus.

Why are there service changes at the hospital?

LHSC continues taking actions to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and help keep people safe. Based on government directives, the hospital reduced clinical services to provide only urgent and emergency care, as well as essential health services. As things are opening up, LHSC is moving forward with initial plans to gradually and carefully expand some clinical services that were paused during the pandemic.

What services are being expanded a part of LHSC's initial plan?

Planned surgeries, procedures and ambulatory care for patients at LHSC are slowly resuming, with prioritization based on clinical evidence and need. We are expanding care gradually and carefully, as hospitals must stay ready for any surges in COVID-19 patients. Additional services will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

Who is making these decisions and how?

We recognize that changes in our service delivery cause uncertainty and worry for patients and their loved ones. Waiting for your care can be very difficult. All treatment decisions are being carefully reviewed by your health-care team and they will continue to monitor your care closely.

Hospitals must follow processes for clinical services expansion that are fair for all patients. Based on the framework, we are guided by the four foundational principles of proportionality, minimizing harm to patients, equity and reciprocity. LHSC's core values of compassion, teamwork, curiosity and accountability continue to guide our daily decision-making.

**When will all services be restored and return to normal?**

Hospitals are facing a lot of challenges. LHSC is regularly monitoring our volumes and the impact on quality of care and safety. The expansion plans will be adjusted along the way. We are working hard to resume additional services when it is safe to do so.

How are the expansion plans being developed?

Health-care providers in Ontario must comply with operational requirements and follow key principles outlined in the Ontario Health framework. LHSC's clinical areas are regularly monitoring and providing updates so that plans can be adjusted as needed based on many different factors. LHSC's initial plan has been approved by Ontario Health West and received support from the Middlesex-London Health Unit. The hospital is also working closely with regional providers including home, community and primary care.

What factors must hospitals consider in developing plans to restore services?

The framework set out by Ontario Health requires an ethical prioritization of patient care while carefully considering several factors. Hospitals must have adequate human resources and support for critical care beds. We need enough supplies of Personal Protective Equipment and necessary medications, and the ability to keep up with diagnostics and lab testing. LHSC is working closely with home and community care as well as primary care services to ensure people get the follow-up care they need.

Will patients continue to wait for care?

We are starting with a gradual expansion of services to make sure we stay ready for whatever COVID-19 might throw our way. Unfortunately, some patients will continue to wait for their care. We recognize this is very difficult for patients and their families/caregivers, and it is hard for us as providers. Health-care teams will continue to monitor each patient's care closely. LHSC is resuming additional services as soon as it is safe to do so.

What to expect**I will be coming into the hospital for my scheduled care. Is it safe?**

The hospital remains safe. Patients coming in for scheduled services are health screened at the door. Patients with a suspected case of COVID-19 are separated from



other patients, and a number of protocols are followed to protect the health and safety of our staff, physicians and patients.

Are visitors allowed at the hospital?

LHSC is temporarily limiting family/caregiver presence and other visitation in order to maintain a safe environment during the pandemic. These changes are aligned with recommendations from the Ministry of Health. We are committed to patient and family-centred care, and will make every effort to meet the needs of patients while these temporary measures are in place. Please visit the hospital website for the most current information and instructions.

What about my caregiver, can they come with me?

LHSC is temporarily limiting family/caregiver presence and other visitation in order to maintain a safe environment during the pandemic. We know this might be difficult for many patients. If you need additional support while you are here, please let the clinic or physician's office know in advance of your visit.

Will I be health screened when I come for my appointment?

Yes, the main entrances have been restricted so that everyone who comes into the hospital is screened. This helps identify signs and symptoms of illness quickly. You may also be called in advance by the clinic or physician's office for screening.

Will I have to wear a mask?

All patients coming in for scheduled visits are required to wear a mask upon entry to the hospital. You will be provided a mask, but you are encouraged to wear your own including a cloth mask. There will be exceptions for patients who cannot tolerate a mask due to their health condition.

Are patients being tested for COVID-19?

Patients with symptoms are being tested for COVID-19. Patients without symptoms who are undergoing a high risk procedure will be tested if they are at risk due to their medical condition.



What's happening with physical distancing measures as LHSC expands services?

The hospital will continue to put physical distancing measures in place and closely follow procedures to prevent infection. We are following the directives from the Ministry of Health and guidance from public health.

Patient's care

What will happen with my care plan?

We will contact you whenever there is a change to your appointment or procedure. If your care has been delayed, we will be in touch with you as soon as we can to discuss opportunities to reschedule. We know you may need time to prepare. Appointments are being booked as telephone or virtual care as much as possible. If you have any questions or concerns about your health, you can reach out to your physician or other member of your health-care team.

I was booked for a surgery. Will I have to re-do my pre-admission appointment?

Depending on when your new surgical date is, you may require a follow-up visit before surgery by phone or in person.

I want to speak to my physician or other member of my health-care team about my care plan. Can I schedule an appointment?

Yes, if you have concerns about your care plan you can schedule a time to speak with your physician or other members of your health-care team. Whenever possible, this will be done remotely as a phone or virtual care appointment.

How is care being prioritized if some patients still need to wait?

All clinical areas are following an ethical prioritization process based on clinical evidence and need. Some services like surgery, endoscopy and diagnostic imaging use a four-point priority ranking and triage system. All treatment decisions are being carefully reviewed by your health-care team and they will continue to monitor your care closely.

What if I am involved in a clinical research study?

The majority of research activity in the hospitals was paused during the pandemic, with only essential studies continuing. The hospital's research arm, Lawson Health Research Institute, is developing its own plans for gradual resumption of research activity in line with our clinical services expansion. If you are involved in a study, that team will



contact you directly about any changes. They are also offering remote appointments when possible.

Concerns

I'm being told it is still safer to delay my important treatment/procedure. I thought the hospital was safe and services were opening up?

While things are getting better, the virus is still spreading in the community. We have strong measures in place to protect people in the hospital, but coming here does mean you will be in physical contact with more people. For each patient, there is a careful consideration as to whether it is riskier for you to delay treatment or come to the hospital now. We know that some people are more susceptible to COVID-19 and would be at a higher risk of complications and poor outcomes if they become sick.

I know of someone else coming in for another appointment that is less urgent than mine. Why have they been prioritized over me?

All clinical areas in the hospital are following an ethical prioritization process based on clinical evidence and need. Your health-care team is carefully reviewing decisions about your care, including safely delaying tests, treatments or other visits. If you have concerns or changing symptoms, please reach out to them to discuss your ongoing care plan.

I've already had my care delayed and I'm still being asked to wait. Why?

I know it's very difficult when you've been waiting a long time. Please know your care is important to us and we continue to monitor your care closely. Please let us know if you have any changes in your symptoms.

I was waiting a long time for this appointment before the pandemic. I don't want it to be delayed.

I know it's very difficult when you've been waiting for a long time. Please know your care is important to us. LHSC is working to reschedule appointments as soon as possible. We need to be ready for any surges in COVID-19 activity, and still face many challenges. Treatment decisions are being carefully reviewed by your health-care team and they will continue to monitor your care closely.

I'm very worried about my health and safety. What should I do?

We recognize that these changes are causing uncertainty and worry for you. Waiting for your care can be very difficult. Please know your care is important to us and your health is our top priority. If you have concerns, including worsening symptoms, you can reach out to your physician or other member of your health-care team. If you have an emergency or serious medical injuries or conditions, please call 911 immediately or go to an Emergency Department.

I have a condition that is life-threatening and I don't feel this is the right decision.

We recognize that changes in our service delivery can cause uncertainty and worry for you, and waiting for your care can be very difficult. Please know your care is important to us. Your well-being is our top priority and your health-care team is monitoring your care closely. If you have health concerns, including worsening symptoms, you can reach out to your physician. You can also speak with a Patient Relations Specialist to discuss your concerns. (519-685-8500 ext. 52036)

My symptoms are getting worse. What should I do?

If you have concerns, including worsening symptoms, you can reach out to your physician or other members of your health-care team. If you have an emergency or serious medical injuries or conditions, please call 911 immediately or go to an Emergency Department.

I'm unhappy about my care. Who should I contact?

If you would like to discuss concerns about your care, you can contact a Patient Relations Specialist at 519-685-8500 ext. 52036.