From: AHS CEO
To: AHS.All
Subject: AHS COVID-19 Update: New AHS Recommendations for Continuous Masking
Date: Friday, April 10, 2020 4:17:45 PM
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Importance: High

New AHS Recommendations for Continuous Masking

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

- **Cases in Alberta**
- **New Recommendations for Continuous Masking**
- **New Continuing Care Restrictions**
- **Update from Dr. Verna Yiu on PPE Guidelines and Procurement**
- **ZEOC Update – Edmonton Zone**
- **New video series — Kids' Questions About COVID-19**
- **Mental Wellness Moment**
- **Shout Out**
- **Extra Shout Out to Jitendra Prasad**
- **Message About This Weekend**

COVID-19 Status

We have confirmed 49 new cases of COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, bringing the provincial total to 1,500. Of the total cases in Alberta to date, 201 are suspected to have been acquired in the community. The number of recovered cases is now at 713.

Today, we must report seven more deaths related to COVID-19. Sadly, this is the highest number of deaths we've seen in a single day. Our sincere condolences go out to the loved ones of these Albertans. We know this is a very hard day for you and we grieve with you. In total, 39 Albertans have now passed away from COVID-19.

Things You Need to Know

New Recommendations for Continuous Masking
There is emerging evidence that asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic or minimally symptomatic individuals can transmit COVID-19.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is implementing a continuous masking strategy, in addition to use of personal protective equipment (PPE) as part of droplet and contact precautions. Areas that can implement continuous masking immediately are encouraged to do so. Over the weekend, Logistics and Contracting, Procurement & Supply Management (CPSM) will be working to ensure all facilities/sites have the required supplies for full implementation of this strategy on Monday (April 13).

The new strategy — consistent with guidance provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada and Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health — is intended to bring consistency across AHS and community healthcare settings, improve safety for both healthcare workers and patients, while aiming for judicious use of masks and PPE.

The recommended approach for masking of healthcare workers providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas in both AHS and community settings is as follows:

- Wear a surgical/procedure mask continuously, at all times and in all areas of the workplace when involved in direct patient contact or if adequate social distancing from patients and co-workers cannot be maintained.
- Use surgical/procedure masks in a judicious manner to help conserve supplies and ensure availability throughout this COVID-19 pandemic.
- The surgical/procedure mask should be immediately changed and safely disposed of whenever it is soiled or wet, whenever it may have become contaminated and after care for any patient on Droplet +/- Contact precautions (i.e. suspected or confirmed influenza-like illness or COVID-19).
- Follow Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) protocols including hand hygiene and the use of additional personal protective equipment when delivering patient care according to the AHS point-of-care risk assessment (PCRA).
- Additional guidance is being developed for extended PPE use in dedicated COVID-19 units and influenza-like-illness-positive holding areas and will be posted at ahs.ca/covidppe.
- When taking a break, or eating a meal, the wearer should dispose of the mask and perform hand hygiene. Social distancing must be maintained and a new mask should be applied before returning to work.

The recommended approach for masking for healthcare workers who do not work in patient care areas and do not have direct patient contact:

- All staff who can perform their duties from home should do so to preserve PPE.
- Individuals whose function must be performed in person do not need to wear a mask but should practice social distancing.
- Masking is required if social distancing cannot be maintained or if entry into patient care areas is required.

There are several reasons for the new recommendations and why we're acting now:

- There is concern some healthcare providers may have early or mildly symptomatic COVID-19. We are recommending continuous masking for those who are face-to-face with patients or who are in work settings where they cannot maintain a consistent six-foot (two-metre) physical distancing from co-workers. The strategy is aimed to protect patients and co-workers.
- A broader healthcare worker masking policy may reduce the number of staff required to be furloughed in the event of exposure to COVID-19.
- PPE conservation is critical and a sustainable approach is required. In other jurisdictions, a consistent policy of continuous mask use has led to reductions in overall PPE use.

Please note: This does not change requirements to self-isolate when sick, and NO healthcare worker with symptoms of illness should come to work. Also, both the Public Health Agency of Canada and Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommend all individuals, including healthcare workers, consider masking when they are out in public.

For more information on PPE guidance, please visit www.ahs.ca/covidppe.

New Continuing Care Restrictions

Additional steps are being taken to prevent the spread of illness in continuing care facilities. All workers in these sites will be required to wear masks at all times when providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas. We are making this change to protect patients from inadvertent exposure from a healthcare worker who could be without symptoms, but still be infectious.

Continuous masking will also minimize the risk of an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic healthcare worker exposing other workers to the illness. In addition to new masking requirements, we are requiring all workers in continuing care facilities to work at only one site. This will help prevent the spread of illness between facilities.

These requirements are currently in effect in outbreak locations for all long term care and supportive living sites across the province. Work is underway with the organizations that provide care in these settings to transition to this requirement, which will be implemented beginning late next week.

Update from Dr. Verna Yiu on PPE Guidelines and Procurement

In her weekly address to AHS staff and physicians, President and CEO Dr. Verna Yiu interviews Dr. Mark Joffe (Vice President & Medical Director of CancerControl Alberta, Clinical Support Services & Provincial Clinical Excellence) about the new recommendations on continuous masking; and Jitendra Prasad (Chief Program Officer, Contracting, Procurement and Supply Management) about AHS's Herculean efforts around the globe to procure additional PPE supplies. Dr. Yiu also encourages staff to find some downtime this long weekend before the organization gears up in preparation for the expected peak of COVID-19 infections next month.

View video

In the Zones

Zone Emergency Operations Centre (ZEOC) Update – Edmonton Zone
Staff and physicians at the Royal Alexandra Hospital are implementing the next level of spring cleaning. Starting today (April 10), the site will announce 'Power Hour' through the overhead speakers at 8 a.m., noon, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.

At that time, all available staff are encouraged to clean high-touch areas such as door handles, phones and keyboards, and also personal items, such as nametags, pens and stethoscopes.

Keeping hospitals clean is fundamental to AHS's response to this global pandemic. Housekeepers deserve recognition for stepping up with the increased demands of cleanliness to help prevent the spread, but the duty to clean is not theirs alone. As part of a COVID-19 response, keeping the hospital clean is everyone's responsibility.

Power Hour is a reminder that it doesn't matter what position you hold or what type of task you are performing; keeping the Royal Alexandra Hospital clean and safe should be every employee at the site's obligation.

The Sturgeon Community Hospital will join the 'Power Hour' movement starting on Monday, April 13.

Be Well - Be Kind

Kids' Questions About COVID-19
Alberta kids want to know: If Anna, Elsa and Olaf get COVID-19, will they get better and keep making Frozen movies?

In the first instalment of the new video series Kids' Questions About COVID-19, Dr. Laura McDougall, Senior Medical Officer of Health at AHS, makes a special call to the kingdom of Arendelle to find out.

Dr. McDougall also explains what COVID-19 is, and why we can't see the virus.

We recently asked Albertans to submit their kids' tough-to-answer questions about COVID-19 using the hashtag #ABKIDSCOVID, and sat down with Dr. McDougall to get answers to some of the most frequently asked questions, plus a few unique ones. Keep watching for new instalments.

Mental Wellness Moment
During times of stress and crisis, like the COVID-19 global pandemic, we hear it's essential to practise self-care. But what does that actually look like? In his latest Mental Wellness Moment, Dr. Nicholas Mitchell — AHS Provincial Medical Director, Addiction and Mental Health — walks viewers through the basics of self-care and explains why taking time for personal needs isn't selfish — it's essential.

This clip is one in a series of short Mental Wellness Moment videos in which Dr. Mitchell talks about protecting your mental health in a time of pandemic. AHS has more resources to look after your mental health at ahs.ca/covid.

Shout Out
Alberta Health Services' Patient and Family Advisory Group met last week — and did so online, maintaining social distancing protocols. Despite being in different parts of the province, the 25 members came together to share a common message of gratitude to all healthcare providers for their hard work during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Here's a photo of the advisory group, sharing their appreciation:

Albertans continue to share with AHS their gratitude for the healthcare providers on the front lines of the province's pandemic response:

> *"Thank you to all the healthcare workers in Alberta caring for us during this pandemic. We see the long hours you put in, we see the stress you are managing and we see the sacrifices you are making for our society. We appreciate you so much. From the bottom of our hearts we thank you."*
>
> -Anonymous

> *"Thank you to everyone, I mean everyone at AHS — to the front-line workers, to the cleaner I saw at Foothills Hospital taking the extra time to clean public areas, to (Alberta's chief medical officer of health) Dr. Deena Hinshaw and to everyone involved in our fabulous provincial healthcare system. We are lucky to live in Alberta! ❤."*
>
> -Anonymous

Extra Shout Out

Jitendra Prasad —Chief Program Officer for Contracting, Procurement and Supply

Management — is a behind-the-scenes workhorse at AHS. His leadership in procurement and supply chain management is coming front and centre these days, and we wanted to give him an extra personal shout out today. Thank you, JP, for all that you are doing to protect our staff and physicians and Albertans. Here's an article about JP that appeared in today's Edmonton Journal for your reading pleasure.

Message About This Weekend
We'd like to thank all of you for all of your hard work during these early weeks of our pandemic response. And yet we know, from the modelling shared earlier this week, that the demand on the healthcare system — and on all of us — will only increase over the coming weeks until the province hits a peak in new cases and hospitalizations, which is expected next month.

So I urge all of you to use this long weekend to find some time to rest, to recharge and — yes — to *not* think about COVID-19. Dr. Nicholas Mitchell, our Provincial Medical Director for Addiction and Mental Health, makes clear in today's Mental Wellness Moment (see above) that taking time for your personal needs is not selfish; in fact, it's essential if we're to be at our best when peak demand hits and we're all needed more than ever. The next few days might be the only period before then where we'll have an opportunity for some downtime. We are both going to disconnect for some time this weekend. We encourage you to do the same.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu
AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall
Senior Medical Officer of Health