

## Public Service Announcement

Tuesday, September 29, 2020

### **A message to the community from Niagara Health President Lynn Guerriero about the second wave of COVID-19**

We now have confirmation of what we have suspected for the last several weeks with the rise in COVID-19 infections – the second wave of the virus is here.

On the advice of his provincial experts, Ontario Premier Doug Ford confirmed yesterday that we are in the second wave and is cautioning that it may be more challenging than the first wave. At this point in time, we have a higher number of daily infections in Ontario than we did with the first wave, including a single-day record of 700 cases reported on Monday. At Niagara Health, we have two patients in our care who are being treated for COVID-19.

Thankfully, we are in a strong position to respond to the second wave because of the hard work of our teams over the last six months.

Niagara Health has successfully resumed scheduled surgeries and other services paused during the first wave of the pandemic. This work is taking place amid new COVID safety measures, which include physical distancing in waiting rooms and increased cleaning between appointments. Despite these additional measures, our teams are working at 100% capacity. As we move forward, our goal is to provide safe, quality care to patients in our care for COVID-19 while maintaining our services at current levels and continuing to welcome caregivers and visitors.

Our experts have been carefully planning for a second wave of the virus. As with the first wave, our St. Catharines Site will be our dedicated COVID-19 site for inpatient acute and critical care. A regional model of care developed with hospitals in our LHIN region, which includes Hamilton, Burlington and Brantford, will support a coordinated response to caring for COVID-19 positive patients, particularly during times when there may be a surge in cases of COVID-19. The goal is to accommodate fluctuations in demand for COVID-19 care while minimizing the impact on our regular operations. If needed, this partnership will provide us with a coordinated approach to transfer patients to a partner hospital that has capacity, allowing us to continue operating regularly scheduled care.

Safety enhancements are in place for everyone who comes into our buildings. Among them:

- Staff, physicians, patients and visitors are screened for COVID-19.
- Masking is mandatory.
- Signage is in place to maintain physical distancing in waiting rooms, elevators and other common areas.
- We have introduced a number of virtual care offerings to our patients to reduce the need for them to come to the hospital in person.

We are working closely with our partners in long-term care to safely manage cases of the virus in their facilities. As demand for tests soared, our assessment centres changed earlier this week to an appointment-only model for testing, and we are prioritizing testing for those at greater risk of infection, consistent with provincial government guidance.

For all of this to work, we need the community's ongoing vigilance with the important public health measures that were so instrumental to Niagara's efforts to limit transmissions during the first wave of COVID-19 – masking, physical distancing and hand washing. We cannot allow pandemic fatigue to get the better of us. This virus can easily spread if we allow it to, and we know these measures are key to prevent the spread of COVID – in the hospital and in the community. This is our new normal.

As always, providing a safe care and work environment is our priority. At this time, there are no changes to our current operations. However, there are a number of moving parts to the second wave, and we will keep the community updated as new information becomes available.

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