Public Service Announcement

Message from Niagara Health President Lynn Guerriero: COVID-19 update

With the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the province, we wanted to provide an update on our work at Niagara Health to manage through the second wave of the pandemic.

No Changes to Our Services
On Monday, November 16, Niagara entered the third of five stages (Orange – Restrict) of the Ontario Government's new COVID-19 response framework to limit transmission of the virus and avoid broader closures. This stage involves implementing enhanced measures, restrictions and enforcement.

At our long-term care home in Welland, we have restricted visitation to essential care providers only based on this provincial guidance. However, the Orange – Restrict phase does not impact existing operations in the hospital.

The St. Catharines Site remains our dedicated COVID-19 site for inpatient acute and critical care. At this time, we have eight patients in our care being treated for COVID-19. As we move forward, our goal is to continue to provide safe, quality care to our patients while maintaining our services at current levels and continuing to welcome visitors and essential care partners.

Planning and Preparedness
Thankfully, we are in a strong position to respond to the second wave because of the hard work of our staff and community partners. Among the measures being taken:

- Launching the COVID Care @ Home program, in partnership with St. Joseph's Home Care, St. Joseph's Health System and community partners. This program is intended for patients diagnosed with COVID but who do not require hospitalization. It will support integrated care at home, early discharge from hospitals with supports and help to prevent hospitalization. COVID Care @ Home was introduced on November 12, and our first patient entered the program the next day.
- Providing timely COVID-19 testing for community members at our three Assessment Centres. Since introducing an online booking platform for COVID tests on October 28, more than 13,000 appointments have been booked online, assisting us in providing more timely service. In many cases, tests are being booked on the same day self-referrals are made.
- Implementing a regional model of care, developed with hospitals in our LHIN region, which includes Hamilton, Burlington and Brantford. The goal is to accommodate fluctuations in demand for COVID-19 care while minimizing any potential disruption to our regular operations. However, if needed, this partnership will provide us with a co-ordinated approach to transfer patients to a partner hospital that has capacity, allowing us to continue operating regularly scheduled care.

- Also, if needed, planning for the potential ramping down of services in a phased manner should subsequent waves of COVID-19 activity in the hospital, community and larger region exceed established thresholds. This planning is taking place in partnership with our partner hospitals in the region.

Visitors and Essential Care Partners

Recognizing the significant role family and friends play in a patient's care journey, we continue to support visitors for inpatients across our sites and recently expanded each daily visiting block by 90 minutes. We now offer two, four-hour blocks each day in which inpatients may have one visitor during each time period. To support safety, visitors to the hospital must pass screening every time they enter the building and follow our mandatory masking policy and all other infection prevention and control protocols.

Niagara Health is developing this new program to further incorporate patients and families into the care delivery model. An Essential Care Partner may provide physical, emotional, and cognitive care to their loved one, will function as another member of the care team and will be included in planning and decision-making processes. Niagara Health plans to launch this program during the month of December. Further details will be provided as the program takes shape.

Safety Enhancements

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.

Long-Term Care

We continue to work closely with our partners in long-term care to safely manage cases of the virus in their facilities.

Our involvement intensified in late October when the provincial government appointed Niagara Health to temporarily manage Millennium Trail Manor, a 160-bed long-term care home in Niagara Falls. Our hospital response team is working collaboratively with the team at Millennium to resolve a challenging COVID-19 outbreak and create sustainable operations over the long term. We are providing leadership and resources in a number of key areas, including stabilization of staffing, management of protective personal equipment and supplies, enhanced levels of infection prevention and control, expanded testing of residents and staff, best practices in clinical care and all aspects of environmental services including cleaning and laundry. Niagara Health has expertise in all areas of infection prevention and control and outbreak management, and we are encouraged with the progress our hospital team is making.

Click here to view the Millennium Trail Manor section on our website.

Vigilance 100% of the Time

With the rising number of cases in Niagara, it's especially important that we remain vigilant with our infection prevention and control practices to maintain a safe environment for all at the hospital, including screening, masking, physical distancing and hand washing.

In closing, please accept our most sincere thanks for the support, co-operation and understanding we have received from the community. We are truly #InItTogether.

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