MEDIA RELEASE

A community message from Lynn Guerriero, Niagara Health President and Interim CEO

In the strongest terms, Niagara Health urges people of all ages to continue following public health measures to minimize further increases in COVID-19 cases in our region and help us protect capacity for life-saving critical care and other services amid unprecedented pressures on the healthcare system.

Niagara Health continues to experience a significant increase in COVID-19 activity at the hospital, including in our Intensive Care Unit. In less than two weeks, the overall number of COVID-19 positive patients in our care has increased from 11 on March 31 (the day before Good Friday) to 39 today. The patients we are seeing are younger, and there is an increase in transmissions of variants of concern in our region. There are a total of 1,062 confirmed active cases of COVID-19 in the region.

Our Emergency Operations Centre meets daily and adjusts our operations, as needed, in a safe and controlled manner to manage surges in patient activity. Our leaders also work closely with hospitals in our region and with provincial partners to support each other. This includes the transferring of critical care patients to Niagara to manage pressures on Intensive Care Units in harder-hit areas of the province.

At this time, we are at 88% capacity in our ICUs (53 patients, which includes 12 patients with COVID-19). We are taking the proactive measure today of opening an additional three beds to increase our critical care capacity to a total of 63 beds given this rapidly changing environment. There are options for further expansion within Niagara Health, however, we do not have unlimited capacity to provide critical care.

Also beginning today, we are postponing a number of scheduled surgeries as per provincial direction to ease pressures on capacity. Each patient will be contacted directly by their care team about their surgery. This does not include emergency and urgent surgeries.

If needed, patients at Niagara Health will be transferred to another one of our sites or to another hospital that can meet their care needs. Patients will only be moved if their care team decides that it is necessary and safe to do so.

Our enhanced infection prevention and control measures remain in place. Members of the community are urged to remain vigilant with all public health measures and encourage others to do the same to reduce the transmission of the virus. This includes masking, physical distancing, handwashing, and having contact with members of your household only– these measures work.

The rally over the weekend, where hundreds were blatantly not following public health measures, was extremely discouraging for our dedicated healthcare teams and undoubtedly other essential workers who have been working full out to serve, and care for, our community for more than a year now.

Niagara Health has a solid plan in place to care for our patients and families. Over 100,000 Niagara residents have received first doses. We understand that there is pandemic fatigue, but we need everyone's ongoing support and vigilance with public health measures, a little longer. This is critically necessary in order to preserve hospital capacity to meet the healthcare needs, both COVID and non-COVID, of our community.

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