

**MEMORANDUM**

PHD-C 01-2020

**Subject: COVID-19 Situational Update****Date: March 18, 2020****To: Regional Council****From: M. Mustafa Hirji, Medical Officer of Health & Commissioner (Acting)****Background to COVID-19**

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a novel coronavirus, first identified in December 2019, in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. COVID-19 causes a relatively mild infection in over 80% of people, i.e. illness that does not require hospital care. The remaining 20% of infections are more severe and typically require hospitalization, with up to 5% of all infections requiring intensive care.

A small percentage of COVID-19 cases result in death. This percentage has varied by part of the world, but is believed to be approximately 0.5% or lower in a country with a well-functioning health system.

**Statistics (Noon, March 18, 2020)**

<b>Geographic Unit</b>	<b># Infections</b>	<b># Deaths</b>	<b># Tests</b>
<b>Worldwide</b>	214,101	8,727	-
<b>United States</b>	7,663	115	-
<b>Canada</b>	657	8	-
<b>Ontario</b>	212	1	13,897
<b>Niagara region</b>	3	0	-
<b>Hamilton</b>	15	0	-
<b>Haldimand-Norfolk</b>	0	0	-
<b>Erie County &amp; Niagara County (US)</b>	7	0	-

85% of cases in Canada are in travelers or close contacts of travelers

100% of cases in Niagara are in travelers or close contacts of travelers

**Federal Response**

Given the strong travel association to most cases in Canada, the federal government has exercised its authority to restrict international travel. This includes

- Ban foreign nationals from all countries except the United States from entering Canada (exceptions: air crews, travelers on layovers to another country,

Canadian permanent residents, diplomats, immediate family of Canadian citizens)

- Restrict all non-essential travel across the US border
- Advising Canadians to avoid all non-essential travel outside of the country
- Requesting all returning international travelers to “self-isolate” for 14 days
- Barring ill persons, regardless of citizenship, from boarding international flights to Canada
- Screening all returning travelers for illness

The Public Health Agency of Canada is strongly encouraging Canadians to practice “social distancing” to protect themselves from anyone who might be carrying COVID-19 infection, and to lessen the spread of the infection within Canada.

The federal government is also investing in and support novel therapies and vaccine development efforts.

The federal government has also announced a \$82 billion aid package to help Canadians and businesses cope with disruption due to COVID-19.

### **Provincial Response**

The provincial government has declared a State of Emergency and enacted intensive social distancing measures to pre-emptively prevent the spread of infection. These include legally binding orders to

- Close until at least March 31:
  - all bars and restaurants, except to the extent that such facilities provide takeout and food delivery
  - all facilities providing indoor recreational programs
  - all public libraries
  - all private schools
  - all licensed child care centres
  - all movie cinemas
  - all theatres, including those offering live performances of music, dance and other art forms
  - all concert venues
- Prohibition of all organized public events of over 50 people, including religious worship until at least March 31

In addition, the province has also implemented the following social distancing measures:

- Closure of all public schools until at least April 5
- Closure, through the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, of all casinos for an indefinite period of time

Given its responsibility over the health care system, the Ontario government through its new agency Ontario Health, is intensively engaged in preparing the system for an expected surge of COVID-19 patients, and is building testing and treatment capacity, including through dedicated assessment centres (the first Niagara assessment centre opened in Niagara Falls on March 17, operated by Niagara Health).

The province, through Public Health Ontario, has also been working to ensure sufficient testing capacity in Ontario as well as summarize the best available science for use by health care and public health workers.

### **Local Response**

The local public health response has focused on three elements:

1. Intensive investigation of cases and contacts of cases. This ensures that anyone infected with COVID-19 is isolated and does not further spread the infection. As well, Public Health identifies who may be a contact of a case to ensure they do not spread the infection if they become ill, and to ensure they are tested if those persons do become ill.
2. Supporting the health care sector, particularly primary care. As a heavy burden is expected on the health care sector, Public Health is working closely with health care providers to help them maximize capacity to manage the COVID-19 outbreak when it hits. This includes facilitating outpatient testing and supporting the new assessment centre run by Niagara Health.
3. Reinforcing the advice of the provincial and federal governments. These include the messages around travel restrictions and social distancing.

In order to manage the intense workload during this time, Public Health has activated emergency operations and redeployed a large percentage of staff towards COVID-19 prevention.

### **Future Outlook**

While all infections in Niagara are currently travel-related (i.e. there is not yet evidence of local circulation of infection), there is increasing evidence of local circulation in other parts of Ontario, including in Toronto. Given the movement of people in Ontario, it is expected that local circulation of COVID-19 will soon present in Niagara.

Aggressive measures by the federal government to limit travel and by the provincial government to limit interaction between people are expected to delay the emergency of a local outbreak of COVID-19. Currently, it is not known what the provincial

government's intentions are with respect to extending such measures beyond March 31 or April 5, as relevant. Infectious disease experts advise that such measures must remain in place for several months to effectively blunt the impact and mortality from the outbreak. The provincial government will likely be considering what is sustainable over that period of time.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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