



March 18, 2020

CLIFF #1158028

HCC Vice Presidents  
Regional Health Authorities

As you know, the Ministry of Health continues to focus on limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and at a provincial level. As you know, most people who become infected with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness that will not require medical care, but those who are vulnerable to the disease – those who are elderly or who have underlying conditions that compromise the immune system – are at risk for severe illness.

Seniors residing in Long Term Care facilities are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, which requires enhanced protection measures aimed at limiting the spread of the virus in Long Term Care homes. Additionally, it is predicted that COVID-19 will lead to significant increased pressure in the acute care system, resulting in the need to transfer appropriate Alternate Level of Care patients to Long Term Care facilities.

To protect those most vulnerable and address anticipated pressures on the acute care system, the Ministry of Health is advising health authorities to:

- Temporarily **suspend interfacility transfers**, except in circumstances of intolerable risk, until further notice and **ensure clients' place on the wait list for transfer is maintained** during the suspension of transfers;
- **Prioritize admissions to Long Term Care from acute** care over those from community where possible;
- Temporarily **suspend all health authority operated/funded HCC adult day programs** and;
- Temporarily **suspend the provision of in-facility respite**, except in circumstances of intolerable risk.

Health authorities have identified a risk in transferring patients between care homes and bringing seniors from the community into Long Term Care for in-facility respite or adult day programs. Temporary suspension of inter-facility transfers, and in-facility respite and adult day programs (ADPs) will enable health care staff to focus on increased surveillance and infection prevention protocols and prevent the spread of COVID-19 from asymptomatic individuals in the community.

Given the anticipated increased pressure in acute care from COVID-19, the Ministry expects health authorities to prioritize admissions from acute care over those from community, except in cases of intolerable risk.

While in-facility respite and ADPs provide important respite for caregivers, the risk of spreading the virus outweighs this benefit. Given the Ministry's efforts to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 from the community to Long Term Care (e.g., restricting visitors) and recognizing the need to free up capacity in Long Term Care, we are directing the suspension of the provision of in-facility respite, except in circumstances of intolerable risk. The Ministry's expectation is that health authorities will ensure that any required services normally provided during adult day programming (e.g., community nursing, nutritional supports) are provided through home visits where possible, given prioritization based on relative need for home care services.

As per the Infection Prevention and Control Outbreak Protocol for COVID-19, in the event of an outbreak in a care facility, this direction changes and restricts all transfers/admissions to Long Term Care in accordance with advice and direction from the local Medical Health Officer.

**The acute care bed capacity that is made available through these initiatives is expected to be dedicated to support COVID-19, and will be managed through your surge capacity planning leaders.**

As the transmission of COVID-19 is expected to continue to increase across the province, ministry staff will continue to engage with health authority home and community care leads to discuss issues and provide direction and advice in response to the situation as it evolves.

Sincerely,



Teri Collins  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Specialized Services Division  
Ministry of Health

