**Thursday, March 19, 2020**

The COVID-19 Assessment Centre is operating effectively. Yesterday, the second day of operation, 28 people were seen, and 25 of them tested. The COVID-19 Assessment Centre is available to people who have been directed there by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU) or Telehealth Ontario.

It must be stressed that testing is done based on a person’s symptoms and potential for exposure to the virus. The time it takes for test results to be returned is based on priority and generally takes from two to seven days. Timing depends on many factors, including time to ship tests to and from a lab, and how many tests the lab is processing. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is expanding COVID-19 test processing. Yesterday, Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott said, “We have ramped up our lab capacity as significantly as possible, and will do more as we need to”.

Hospital leaders are looking into developing COVID-19 test processing in the lab at the Hospital, possibly sometime in April. This would build more capacity and enhance the turn-around time for test results. Information will be shared as it becomes available.

Elective surgeries and non-essential services are ramping down. Essential services, such as intensive care, stroke care, and life- and limb-saving surgeries will continue, with all other services provided based on priority needs. Patients who are impacted will be contacted by their physician or our Hospital. Please help to share that information. All efforts are made to keep the community informed of our status. However, this situation is complicated. Updates will be frequent, and often complex, with unknown variables. For example, at this time, it is simply not known whether a non-urgent MRI appointment in June will be impacted, or when a cancelled appointment will be rescheduled.

Our Hospital has received questions regarding possible sources of infection, such as the need to touch parking gate entry buttons or parking tokens. This level of risk awareness is highly encouraging. There are many surfaces people might touch on their way to the Hospital, such as keys, purses/bags, steering wheels, door handles, etc. That is why all people must clean their hands when entering the Hospital as part of our screening process.

Hospital staff have raised questions about proper practices regarding interactions with loved ones and clothing worn at work. The Ontario Medical Association has reliable, valuable information available at <https://content.oma.org/wp-content/uploads/private/Guidelines-Social-Distancing-OMA.pdf>.

The dedication and extraordinary support of Hospital staff, professional staff, volunteers and partners enables our efforts to protect our community. Thank you all.

For questions about COVID-19 testing criteria, please contact the TBDHU’s Infectious Disease Program at 807-625-5900 or toll free at 1-888-294-6630.

Local COVID-19 case status: <https://www.tbdhu.com/coronavirus>

Provincial COVID-19 case status: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus#section-0>

Canada COVID-19 case status: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

COVID-19 Daily Situation Report videos: <https://comms.tbrhsc.net/covid-update-videos>

All Hospital COVID-19 updates are available on the iNtranet at <https://comms.tbrhsc.net/covid-19-information/>