

# COVID-19 UPDATE

## Keeping You Safe



To: All Hospital Staff and Professional Staff

From: Dr. Stewart Kennedy, COVID-19 Incident Manager

Date: June 1, 2020

**RE: Possible COVID-19 Outbreak under Investigation**

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the health and safety of patients, staff, professional staff and the community has been our utmost priority. The Hospital's Incident Management Team is disheartened to report that there is a possible COVID-19 outbreak currently under investigation at our Hospital. This development is upsetting to everyone, and we recognize that it may increase anxiety for some people. We will work through this together.

We are collaborating with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and our Infection Prevention & Control experts to trace contacts. All known contacts, including patients, staff and professional staff, have been or will be tested as soon as possible. The total number of people possibly exposed will be determined through the investigation, but is expected to be higher than 100. The staff and professional staff tested for COVID-19 as a result of this incident will continue to work unless they display or suspect any symptoms. We expect Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols will be meticulously followed.

We must and will do everything in our power to limit the risk of spread. Precautionary measures are being implemented to protect all, including restricting all non-essential entrance to the Hospital. This includes the cancellation of non-essential procedures, such as non-urgent surgeries and ambulatory care appointments. Every effort to contact impacted patients is underway. We understand that further delays in these services may be frustrating for patients, and extend our sympathy.

Outpatient dialysis, cancer treatment and paediatric activity will be maintained. Those who require urgent care will always receive it at our Hospital.

In addition, we must extend further Essential Care Partners restriction until further notice. At this time, Essential Care Partners are only allowed for patients of the Women and Children's program. These restrictions are difficult, though necessary. Virtual visitation options are available to all patients in the Hospital.

The possible outbreak is a result of a locum physician testing positive for COVID-19. The physician worked in several areas of the Hospital over the course of six days before testing positive.

Despite extensive recruitment efforts, our Hospital is still highly dependent on physicians who live elsewhere to provide critical services to Northwestern Ontario. At the beginning of the

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pandemic, we restricted any travel from outside of Northwestern Ontario. Those restrictions were decreased to ensure the provision of care, as local physicians began to experience exhaustion due to the extra work required to meet demand.

All essential physicians from outside Northwestern Ontario are screened prior to arrival to this region. Those who develop COVID-19 symptoms or have suspected exposure are tested. While working at our Hospital, they must wear a mask and gloves during patient interactions.

The physician involved, who cannot be named due to privacy regulations, has been a dedicated health care provider at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre since the Hospital opened in 2004. The physician worked at our Hospital from May 25th to May 30th, and was taken off work on May 31<sup>st</sup> due to symptoms. The physician tested positive for COVID-19 infection. The physician is now in isolation.

We are deeply troubled by this incident, which will unfortunately impact many people.

In order to avoid a recurrence, we have again minimized any travel of health care providers from outside Northwestern Ontario. Those who are absolutely essential will be tested with a COVID-19 swab even if asymptomatic. If they have any symptoms, they will be swabbed again 48 hours later prior to being allowed to work. If they are symptomatic, they will not be allowed to work even if COVID-19 negative.

Our focus at this time is to contain the spread and protect patients, staff, professional staff and community members. Undoubtedly, there are questions regarding professional ramifications. Such decisions will be investigated.

We are monitoring the situation very closely and remain committed to transparency. Regular updates regarding this situation will be provided.

For more information, please contact your supervisor.

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