

February 27, 2020

To: Federation of Regulated Health Care Professionals

Subject: Updates for novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

While the risk to Albertans remains low, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services (AHS) are preparing for potential cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We want to ensure health-care workers have up-to-date information and feel well informed and equipped to navigate through the changing COVID-19 situation.

The care and support that regulated health care professionals provide Albertans is vital. It is important that all health care professionals in Alberta review their business continuity and emergency preparedness plans.

Cases

There are no confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 in Alberta at this time. The number of COVID-19 tests performed and the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are reported on the Alberta Health website: www.alberta.ca/coronavirus.

Current Risk

The current risk of exposure for people in Alberta is considered low. Cases are being reported in many provinces in China and other parts of the world. At this time, the higher risk applies to people who have potential exposures that meet any of the following criteria:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>. Anyone who has had an exposure listed here, and develops fever, cough, or shortness of breath should immediately self-isolate and call 811 for an assessment.

Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) Recommendations for COVID-19

At this time, it appears the virus is transmitted by larger droplets, like from a cough or sneeze. It is also possible for people to be exposed to the virus from contaminated objects or surfaces by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. It may be possible for the virus to survive on surfaces for several days, if not cleaned. Current evidence indicates it is not airborne through long distances or times. There is no evidence that it is capable of being transmitted by imported goods.

Droplet and contact precautions are recommended for patients presenting with influenza-like illness, as per standard recommendations. This is equally important for patients with history of travel to areas affected by COVID-19. N95 masks are required only when performing aerosol-generating procedures. Note that valid fit testing is required for N95 mask selection. AHS IPC guidelines for COVID-19: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/hi-ipc-emerging-issues-ncov.pdf>.

General Prevention

There are many common respiratory viruses circulating in Alberta and globally, such as influenza. This will be the most likely cause of a respiratory infection, unless the ill person recently returned from an area where the novel coronavirus is circulating. To help protect against all respiratory illnesses, including the flu and coronavirus, you should:

- use good hygiene practices, such as frequent handwashing
- stay at home and away from others if you are feeling ill
- regularly clean high-touch surfaces, and
- contact your primary health provider or 811 Health Link if you have questions or concerns about your health.

Travelers returning to work

All staff in healthcare settings returning from affected areas who may have been exposed to COVID-19 should be assessed by their own Occupational Health Services or AHS Public Health before returning to work (regardless of whether or not they have symptoms). Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health employees should contact their Workplace Health and Safety (WHS)/OHS representatives. All other staff in health care settings should connect with Public Health by calling Health Link at 811 for an individual exposure risk assessment and to determine when to return to work.

Other returning travelers (non health-care workers) should follow current recommendations from Alberta Health for symptom monitoring and isolation: <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#toc-4>.

For the latest COVID-19 information, please visit www.alberta.ca/coronavirus or <http://www.ahs.ca/covid>.