MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, April 9, 2021

Kingston Health Sciences Centre responding to third wave with service reductions

KINGSTON, Ont. – In response to rising COVID-19 hospitalizations and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) occupancy, Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC) is postponing all elective surgeries and non-urgent procedures and clinic visits until the demands of the third wave have lessened.

"Hospitals throughout the province have been asked by Ontario Health to ramp down activity in order to make critical care capacity available to handle a surge in admitted patients; we are responding accordingly and will monitor the situation daily and adjust plans as needed," KHSC president and CEO Dr. David Pichora says. "Postponing elective surgeries and decreasing outpatient clinic activity will help us allocate beds and health-care workers where they are needed most."

Patients whose surgeries or clinic appointments need to be delayed will be notified by phone by their health-care provider's office. If patients do not receive a phone call, they should attend their appointments as planned. Patients who have questions or concerns about their care should contact a member of their care team directly.

With the COVID-19 variants having more severe and fatal consequences, KHSC is anticipating the next several weeks to be very difficult for the overall health system.

"That is why we are making these tough decisions now; so that we can continue to provide the critical and emergency care that patients in southeastern Ontario depend on us to deliver," Dr. Pichora says.

Emergency care for patients suffering from conditions such as traumas, strokes and heart attacks will continue, as will diagnostic image testing such as MRIs and non-deferrable care for diseases like certain cancers and for those who go into labour.

The public should continue to call 9-1-1 in medical emergencies, and visit the emergency department and urgent care centre as needed.

It is challenging to predict what the critical-care demand will be on any given day at KHSC, the regional trauma centre, where occupancy can change with little notice. "Now with more severe COVID-19 cases on the rise, that unpredictability has increased, and we need to be prepared for any scenario," Dr. Pichora says.

By late Friday, it is expected that there will be 23 patients with COVID-19 from the Eastern Ontario Health Region admitted to KHSC's Kingston General Hospital (KGH) site. KHSC has three critical care units. At this time, KHSC's main ICU is at 100 per cent capacity, with more than half of these patients requiring non-COVID critical care.

With support from the Ministry of Health over recent months, KHSC is in a position to open additional ICU and acute-care beds, and is well positioned to meet increasing demand.

In addition to maximizing its resources at both hospital sites – KGH and Hotel Dieu Hospital (HDH) – KHSC is working with its regional hospital partners and within its community partnerships to free up beds and create more capacity to deliver the tertiary-level care it is designated to provide.

"We're not at the point where we need to open the alternate health facility at the Union Street site," Dr. Pichora says. "If we were to open the site tomorrow, we would still need to make tough decisions about reducing services, so that we could redeploy our health-care workers."

Recognizing the disruption the pandemic has caused in the lives of patients and families, Dr. Pichora continues to ask for everyone's patience and understanding as communities go through this third wave.

"We also thank everyone for continuing to adhere to the public health measures that will greatly reduce the spread of COVID-19, and we acknowledge our health-care workers who continue to demonstrate tremendous perseverance in difficult times," Dr. Pichora says.

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