



NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Latest in our efforts against COVID-19 – Cautious, phased return to a ‘new normal’ continues at NHH as province enters Stage 3 ***In-person visiting scheduled to resume at hospital next weekend***

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Friday, July 17th, 2020—The ramp up of non-urgent surgeries, procedures and tests continues steadily at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH), with a cautious eye to the relaxing of many provincial restrictions on one hand, and the recent increase in confirmed cases in the region ([now 24 with two hospitalizations](#)) on the other.

Northumberland is among the Ontario regions approved to enter [“Stage 3”](#) of the province’s reopening framework today, meaning that:

- indoor gathering limits are now increased to a maximum of 50 people;
- outdoor gathering limits have increased to a maximum of 100 people; and,
- nearly all businesses and public spaces will reopen.

“While the province’s reopening framework contains a broad range of public health and workplace safety measures and restrictions, including physical distancing requirements, our team at NHH remains cautious given the high inpatient occupancy levels within NHH today, the risks inherent in increased community interactions, and regular flu season not far out on the horizon.” said Linda Davis, NHH President and CEO.

“The fact remains – COVID-19 is still circulating in the community,” said Davis. “We are grateful for the province’s slow and measured response to reopening, and NHH strongly encourages residents to continue to move forward while observing the preventive measures that have served us so well to date: physical distancing, wearing a mask when physical distancing might not be possible, hand-washing, and getting tested if you have concerns you may have been exposed to COVID-19,” said Linda Davis, NHH President and CEO. “These steps are essential if we are to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and protect precious inpatient capacity.”

Services continue to ramp back up at NHH. Guided by a multi-disciplinary Service Continuity and Planning Working Group, this includes:

- surgical services, now at 80 per cent of pre-COVID-19 activity (e.g. colonoscopies, cataracts, hernia repairs and selected gynecological procedures)
- diagnostic imaging procedures, now at 65 per cent of pre-COVID-19 activity (e.g. CT exams, MRIs, ultrasounds, x-ray, mammography, nuclear medicine and interventional radiology procedures, like joint injections and pain management);
- small volumes of in-person ambulatory care clinic appointments; and
- a limited number of in-person community mental health appointments through the Walk-In Counselling Clinic at 1011 Elgin Street West, Cobourg.

Safety for patients as well as staff and physicians remains top of mind with ‘watch’ indicators like inpatient bed capacity, availability of staff and personal protective equipment supplies being closely monitored as patient volumes increase in two-week increments.

Said Davis: “Our strategy has been to resume a service, or a portion of a service, then monitor patient flow to ensure the conditions required to safely continue re-opening remain in place and inadvertent bottle necks do not occur to impact the necessary physical distancing requirements. Wherever possible, virtual services are also being considered.”

As in the earlier stage of NHH's ramp up last month, those awaiting surgery at NHH continue to be notified by the referring physician to arrange pre-operative COVID-19 testing, if required. Diagnostic imaging tests will be scheduled directly by the hospital. In all cases, pre-screening is being conducted by hospital staff, by phone, to review a standard set of COVID-19 questions, provide logistical details, and answer any questions.

Accessing COVID-19 testing

Open daily, 8AM to 4PM, and accessible through the Emergency Department entrance at NHH, the hospital's COVID-19 Assessment Centre continues to care for high volumes of patients. To date the Centre has supported over 11,013 virtual and in-person visits, 2,028 of which were completed in collaboration with Northumberland Paramedics at a range of local locations, from area long-term care and retirement homes, to Alderville First Nation's Health and Social Services. Of those visits, swabs to test for COVID-19 have been completed on more than 6,297 individuals—almost 2,000 swabs in the past month alone.

While walk-ins are accepted, it is strongly recommended that individuals call ahead to the Centre **(905-377-7783)** to schedule their assessment. This will help the team minimize wait times for all who need this service, and support physical distancing requirements. As always, if symptoms are severe, call 911 and alert the dispatcher to the potential concern regarding COVID-19 so they can be appropriately prepared.

Active screening at all public entrances

Active screening at the main front entrance, the Emergency Department entrance, and the dedicated dialysis/cancer and supportive care entrance continues. Questions are asked to assess COVID-19 risk of all who enter and temperatures are taken. Anyone who fails the screening test is asked to proceed to the assessment centre (or Emergency Department) for assessment.

Universal masking at NHH

Universal masking continues throughout NHH. Those coming into the hospital for an appointment or to the Emergency Department who already have a cloth mask in good, clean condition, are reminded to please bring it with them and plan to wear it throughout their visit. If you do not have a cloth mask, NHH will provide one for you which you can take home and reuse. The blue, non-medical masks distributed to patients and visitors at NHH are being generously sewn by a small team of local volunteers using material designed for the sterilization of medical equipment. Thanks to the effort of these 'blue mask' volunteers, many medical-grade masks have been preserved for use by front-line health care providers. If worn properly, cloth masks help to cover your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating other people or surfaces around you. No mask is useful, however, unless it is worn and removed properly. [See this video](#) from the Government of Canada for information on how to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly to continue to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Food and drink restrictions

Please refrain from bringing food and drink into the hospital when coming in for an appointment or to the Emergency Department. NHH requires masks to be worn by all who are able to tolerate them and, as such, food and drinks cannot be safely consumed.

In-person visiting to resume on weekends, beginning July 25

Visitor and family presence is integral to patient safety, the healing process, the patient's medical and psychological well-being, comfort and quality of life. While NHH had an open visiting policy prior to COVID-19, since the onset of the pandemic, traffic within the hospital has been restricted and in-person visits have been limited to essential visitors only, namely a patient that is dying or very ill; a support for a delivering mother; a parent/guardian of a child or primary family caregiver for an individual with specific needs.

Beginning Saturday, July 25, NHH is preparing to resume inpatient unit visits for one designated visitor or primary family caregiver in a set timeframe when traffic in and out of the hospital for outpatient care is typically low (weekends) and physical distancing requirements can be met. Further details will follow, closer to the July 25th date, assuming no significant local increase of positive cases between now and then.

NHH's Virtual Visiting program continue to be available. Over 170 of these have been coordinated since the Program launched in April. Virtual visits may be scheduled weekdays by contacting the hospital's Virtual Visiting Team at 905-372-6811 ext. 3146 or by email to virtualconnections@nhh.ca. Note: to protect patient privacy, the patient's full name should not be included in the email.

Hand hygiene

Whether visiting NHH or running errands out and about in the community, washing your hands often is one of the best ways to minimize the spread of potentially dangerous germs. Wash your hands frequently, preferably with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available, and avoid touching your face and eyes.

Mental health supports

The emotional and psychological impact of COVID-19 and the change and uncertainty it has brought to our lives is significant. Reach out if you need to speak with someone. Free supports are available locally and from a range of provincial resources. Below are some options available.

Walk-in Counselling Clinic (905-377-7784), Tuesdays from 8 AM – 4PM and Thursdays from 10 AM to 6 PM – temporarily shifted to a virtual model as a result of COVID-19, the walk-in is also available to a limited number of in-person appointments for individuals without access to phone and/or virtual services. Precautions will be in place to ensure client safety with appropriate physical distancing.

Connect with peers on the Big White Wall – an anonymous online community where members can support each other 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, the [Big White Wall](#) offers a self-assessment, reading resources, self-guided courses and creative tools to help express how you're feeling.

BounceBack – a free skill-building program for adults and youth 15+, [BounceBack](#) offers the guidance of a coach to work through a series of workbooks at your own pace to help gain practical skills to help manage low mood, anxiety, worry or stress.

Kids Help Phone – for support at any time of day, children and youth can call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 to contact the Kids Help Phone.

For individuals in crisis:

- Call Four County Crisis at **1-705-745-6484** or **1-866-995-9933**;
- Reach out to the Community and Social Services Help Line by dialing **211**; or,
- Go to the closest Emergency Department.

For more information on mental health resources see the Ontario mental health, wellness and addictions support summary on the province's COVID-19 website [here](#).

COVID-19 - Support for people

A range of supports are available through the provincial government to ease burdens associated with COVID-19. Learn more about the financial and other supports available [here](#).

For the latest hospital news on COVID-19, and links to useful local, regional and provincial resources, please see our NHH website: www.nhh.ca/covid-19

Media contact: Jennifer Gillard, Senior Director, Public Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, jgillard@nhh.ca or 905-377-7757.

About Northumberland Hills Hospital – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, NHH delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, obstetrical care and palliative care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care and rehabilitation. Mental health care, chemotherapy, dialysis and 16 other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists. NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs approximately 600 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians and volunteers. NHH is an active member of Ontario Health (East) – formerly the Central East Local Health Integration Network. For more information, please visit www.nhh.ca or follow us on Twitter [@NorHillsHosp](#).

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