



NEWS RELEASE/PUBLIC NOTICE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 information at March 17, 2020 – A message to our community

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Tuesday, March 17, 2020 — Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) staff, physicians and community partners are working very hard to keep ahead of the rapidly evolving situation regarding COVID-19.

“While the global pandemic is changing how we operate, NHH continues to provide essential services,” said Linda Davis, President and CEO. “By following the directions of our public health experts and taking pre-emptive steps together to slow the spread of this virus and ‘bend the COVID-19’ curve, your hospital team is working to ensure that we will continue to be here for you and your family if and when you need us.”

In light of the many changes that are occurring to protect and maintain essential services, we have summarized the key highlights for you here in a special **March 17 COVID-19 Message to our Community**. We are sharing this through our usual NHH, NHH Foundation and NHH Auxiliary communication channels. As always, we sincerely thank local media and community partners for the continued support to help get this and future essential information out quickly and accurately, as needed.

Essential vs non-essential services are now being reviewed

On direction from the Minister of Health and Ontario Health, NHH is now taking steps to pause or postpone elective and ‘non-essential’ services in the next few days. Our team is using a priority assessment tool to focus our efforts on essential work and postpone services and/or work deemed non-essential. If your test or procedure was booked by NHH, please know that you will be notified by a member of our team of any postponement.

Walk-in Community Mental Health Counselling shifting to phone support

Effective Tuesday, March 17, the [Walk-In Community Mental Health Counselling clinic](#) will be temporarily closed to walk-in clients. Phone support for clients will continue on regular walk-in days (Tuesdays from 8 am – 4pm and Thursdays from 10 am – 6pm). Call 1-905-377-7784 for walk-in support. Your call will be returned by walk-in staff by the end of the business day. As always, for individuals in mental health 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

NEW visitor restrictions

Effective Tuesday, March 17, NHH will begin restricting all visitors within the hospital. We appreciate that this is difficult for many of our patients, but this is consistent with steps being taken in the long-term care sector as well as many other acute care hospitals. Visitors for palliative patients or the acutely ill will be permitted on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the health care team, as will the personal partner and coach/doula identified in advance by Obstetrical patients. Children (16 and under) and pets are strictly prohibited from visiting at this time, with the sole exception of personal support animals. At all times, anyone who is feeling unwell should not visit/accompany a patient to the hospital.

Volunteer restrictions now in place

NHH volunteers have ceased on-site volunteer duties. We know that this will be a challenge for our organization as we are heavily reliant on volunteer support, but out of an abundance of caution we know it is the right move at this time. This includes all NHH Auxiliary volunteers, Patient and Family Advisors, Foundation volunteers, Board members, Spiritual Care Volunteers and St. John Therapy Dog volunteers. Special allowances will be made for palliative and other patients who request visits from their chaplain or priest.

Active screening at all public entrances

NHH is actively screening incomers at all public entrances to assess for symptoms and to support the visitor restrictions as noted above. The wing used by patients to access both dialysis and cancer and supportive care services has been restricted to minimize traffic near this vulnerable patient population.

Social distancing

When people come together the risk of infection increases. NHH is practicing social distancing in every way possible. Examples of practices now in place are as follows:

Dining changes

- Effective Wednesday, March 18 NHH's Main Street Bistro will be closed to the public and open to staff/physicians only, with a limited number of food options.
- Communal patient dining in Post-Acute Support Services (In-Patient Rehabilitation and Restorative Care) ceased following breakfast service today (Tuesday, March 17) – all patients will receive meals in their rooms.

Meeting/event changes

- External meetings/special events planned for NHH have been or will be cancelled until further notice (eg. PACE)
- Non-essential meetings with external partners are being cancelled

COVID-19 Assessment Centre established

As previously shared, this service opened on Saturday, March 14. It is open daily from 8AM to 8PM. See [details on nhh.ca](https://nhh.ca). Volumes have been high. Please help our Assessment team help those who need us most. Not everyone needs to go to an assessment centre for testing. Self-assess before coming in with [the online tool on Ontario's COVID-19 website](https://www.ontario.ca/page/the-online-tool-on-ontarios-covid-19-website). As noted below, those without internet access or literacy will need help so please support them as you are able with the self-screening steps.

Close collaboration with community partners

Regional and local teleconferences are being held regularly with our partners, including local public health, primary care providers, community care providers, municipal leaders and more to support consistency and ensure coordination of efforts across providers.

Reminder about information sources

For the most recent provincial information on COVID-19, including symptoms to watch for and the status of cases in Ontario, see Ontario's dedicated COVID website: ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus or the local Public Health website at <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/>. NHH has links to these and more, as well as regularly updated answers to frequently asked questions, on our dedicated COVID-19 webpage: [NHH.ca/COVID-19](https://nhh.ca/COVID-19). Please follow us and our Foundation on our social media feeds and share. Those without regular internet access or literacy, or with special needs, will need help to get accurate information. Please support them as you are able by sharing essential information through word-of-mouth.

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

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 the Central East Local Health Integration Network. For more information, please visit www.nhh.ca or follow us on Twitter [@NorHillsHosp](https://twitter.com/NorHillsHosp).

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