

CORRECTION: Province Implementing Enhanced Measures to Protect Ontarians from COVID-19

Extensive Planning to Prepare Province for All Scenarios

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TORONTO — As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to evolve globally, Ontario is taking further action to ensure the province's health care system is positioned to continue to safeguard the health and well-being of Ontarians.

Since being formally constituted, Ontario's new [Command Table](#) has been refining and finalizing plans for the implementation of enhanced measures to ensure the province is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to any scenario, including:

- Enhanced access to screening;
- Expanding lab-testing capacity; and
- Implementing new initiatives to keep the public and frontline workers safe.

"Ontario's public health system continues to demonstrate remarkable responsiveness to COVID-19," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "While we have so far effectively contained new cases of this virus, we are relentlessly focused on planning for any scenario. We are actively working with our partners at all levels in the health care system to implement enhanced measures to ensure that we are prepared to protect the health of all Ontarians."

Enhanced Access to Screening

To rapidly expand screening and ease pressures on hospital emergency departments, Ontario will **immediately establish a number of dedicated assessment centres** in areas experiencing significant growth in testing. Some of the first wave of assessment centres will open in the next several days, including at William Osler Health System - Peel Memorial site, The Ottawa Hospital, North York General Hospital, Mackenzie Health, Scarborough Health Network, and Trillium Health Partners. These centres are located in dedicated spaces that will facilitate high-quality care, to protect broader patient populations.

Additional assessment centres will be established across the province in the coming weeks. Regions without an assessment centre will continue to be serviced by their local hospital or primary care settings.

Ontario has also **approved new physician billing codes** for telephone assessments, enabling doctors to conduct more assessments over the phone rather than in their clinic, helping to keep patients at home rather than in primary care settings where they would co-mingle with others.

In the coming days, the province will also **launch a new COVID-19 self-assessment tool** on its [dedicated web page](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus) (Ontario.ca/coronavirus). This new tool will take the public through a series of questions to help inform those who are concerned about having contracted COVID-19 about how they can seek care based on their needs.

Ontario is **working closely with Telehealth to ensure adequate support to handle increased call volumes and is committed to allocating additional resources as needed** to ensure timely responses for Ontarians. In addition to continuing to review virtual care capacity, including further expanding Telehealth and encouraging virtual care uptake, the Command Table has initiated early planning for the implementation of at-home testing, all of which will support caring for people at home.

Expanding Lab-Testing Capacity

Working with Public Health Ontario and Ontario Health, the province is working to **enhance laboratory testing capacity** across the province to rapidly mobilize, monitor and coordinate COVID-19 testing.

Laboratory testing is also being conducted on other respiratory samples from hospital emergency departments and long-term care homes in order to identify and quickly respond to any unknown cases of COVID-19.

Protecting the Public and Frontline Workers

To ensure Ontarians have access to credible and up-to-date information on how to maintain their health and the health of their families, Ontario has **launched a provincewide public education campaign**. The campaign, which includes search, social, print and radio ads on every-day steps Ontarians can take to keep themselves safe, is in addition to the resources available on Ontario.ca/coronavirus. This dedicated [web page](#) is now being **updated twice a day** (10:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. EST), seven days a week, with relevant information on any new cases and includes **fact sheets translated in nearly 30 distinct languages**.

As the global and local situation evolves, the [Command Table](#) will continue to evaluate the latest evidence to provide ongoing guidance to the public and providers. Ontario has issued **updated guidelines to long-term care homes** to ensure active screening for all staff, volunteers, family members, as well as new and returning residents, and will do so for retirement homes shortly. Ontario will continue to update guidelines for other health care facilities in response to the evolving situation.

In addition to these extensive planning measures, Ontario is providing stability to municipalities as they complete 2021 budget planning by committing to **extending one-time mitigation funding for an additional calendar year** for the province's public health units. This action ensures that historical municipal adjustments remain capped at 10 per cent, and recognizes the considerable time and resources necessary for public health units to effectively respond to COVID-19. Extending mitigation funding would keep municipal funding levels for public health units in calendar year 2021 at the same level as calendar year 2020. This is in addition to the up to \$100 million COVID-19 Contingency Fund announced yesterday.

QUICK FACTS

- Last week, Ontario established a new [Command Table](#) to serve as a single point of oversight providing executive leadership and strategic direction to guide the ongoing response to this new virus.
- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory infections like bronchitis, pneumonia or severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).
- There is no vaccine available to protect against COVID-19, but there are every-day actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses. To find out more visit Ontario's [website](#).

LEARN MORE

- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.
- Learn about [travel advisories](#) related to the 2019 novel coronavirus.
- If you are a health care professional, learn how to protect yourself and your patients by reading our [guidance documents](#).

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