

Jeremy Graf

From: COVID-19, HE0 <COVID19@health.gov.sk.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 3:04 PM
To: Jeremy Graf
Cc: 'Office of the Premier'; Minister JU; Minister HE
Subject: Questions for Chief Medical Health Officer
Attachments: Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms.pdf

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President
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The Honourable Jim Reiter, Minister of Health, has asked that I reply to your April 28, 2020, letter to Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer for Saskatchewan, regarding COVID-19. I appreciate you taking the time to share the concerns of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms. Minister Reiter also asked that the Honourable Don Morgan, Q.C., Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Saskatchewan, be copied on this response.

There is increasing evidence that some COVID-19 infected people who never develop symptoms or are not yet sick are able to transmit the virus. Sometimes the symptoms are so mild that people do not pay attention to them. For the greater good, physical distancing measures are implemented to keep you and others as safe as possible during this pandemic as recommended by international disease control experts.

Along with appropriate hand washing, coughing and sneezing into your sleeve and avoiding large gatherings, physical distancing is one of the most important known measures to decrease the transmission of COVID-19 at this time. The Chief Medical Health Officer will continue to closely monitor disease transmission. In order to mitigate the risk of an increase in cases, long-term measures and restrictions related to travel, gatherings and long-term care facilities will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

On April 23, 2020, restrictions on visitation for compassionate care were updated for Saskatchewan health facilities. Compassionate reasons may include immediate family during end-of-life care, family of patients prior to a major surgery, or visitors aiding in clinical care (at the discretion of the patient's care provider). These updates include care facilities that provide long-term care services and personal care homes where it is determined that the resident needs are unable to be met by the care team. Visits in these situations are restricted to two designated healthy individuals with one healthy family/support person present at a time.

Visitor restrictions may be hard on residents and their families; however, staff are working hard to facilitate innovative ways to assist family to have meaningful visits with their loved ones. This may include virtual visits or visiting through windows.

Social isolation as well as changes in economic conditions will, and has, resulted in stressful situations for individuals and families in Saskatchewan and across Canada. Although the public health order limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people remains in place, with extreme caution, one or two close families and friends may form an extended household group.

The Saskatchewan health-care system is providing resources to assist citizens in coping with stress, anxiety, and depression and tools to enhance resiliency. Mental Health and Addictions Services have remained accessible during the COVID 19 pandemic. This includes virtual methods of therapy specific to depression, anxiety and problematic substance use. Individuals with pre-existing mental health disorders have been identified as at-risk for relapse and continue to be supported in the community setting and psychiatric in-patient facilities remain available for admissions.

Recognizing that problematic drug and alcohol use may increase during COVID 19, detox facilities have remained open and accessible. Harm reduction services continue to be available to address the risks associated with opioid use disorder as well as alcohol.

Suicide is a very complex issue and while there is always attention given to any emerging trends related to suicide, there is not the type of empirical data to inform predictions based on modeling.

Pandemic planning in Saskatchewan included continuing with emergency surgeries, urgent cancer The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) is initiating a phased resumption of health care services starting mid-May. The plan will focus on everyday health services and will start to reverse some of the changes and reductions resulting from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Service resumption may vary across the province based on factors such as outbreaks, capacity, availability of health care workers, and critical supplies. Progressing to future phases will be based on assessing these and other factors constantly to ensure it is safe to move forward.

To date, the SHA has continued to provide emergency surgeries, urgent cancer surgeries, and other urgent surgeries such as those for cardiac conditions. Beginning later in May, the SHA will resume surgeries from the six-week urgent category and previously postponed surgeries. COVID-19 outbreaks, availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), and human resource pressures will be used as a guide to advance to the next phases of resuming surgical services for longer waiting patients such as those waiting for joint replacement.

Public health officials continue to assess the national and provincial public health risks, based on the best available evidence as the situation evolves. Officials will re-evaluate and tailor measures, as necessary, to ensure staff and patient safety.

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, the Government of Saskatchewan is providing frequent updates to the public through its website at www.saskatchewan.ca/COVID19, news releases, and news conferences. The website provides information for Saskatchewan residents, health-care workers, schools and workplaces as well as guidance on infection prevention, self- isolation/self-monitoring, mass gatherings, and travel.

COVID-19 Inquiries

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