

## COVID-19 in the Calgary Zone: PCN update #7 – April 22, 2020

Dear colleagues, PCN staff and teams,

It has been a challenging week but family physicians and support staff -- in partnership with PCNs and AHS -- stepped up to the plate once again and showed that primary care can play a key role in the pandemic response.

The spirit of collaboration that has long been associated with the Calgary Zone was evident as hundreds of COVID patients were attached or returned to Medical Homes. The supported transitions team worked tirelessly to manage 948 24-hour and 366 4-hour referrals from Health Link from April 13-19, with more than 1,000 handled by PCN clinics. There were also 436 referrals from public health from April 16-20.

Meanwhile, in High River, Calgary Rural PCN mobilized to support swabbing in response to the local outbreak, with neighbouring PCNs joining the effort to place patients with the right provider.

Despite the significant stress already placed on family practices over the past few months, the efforts we saw over the past week were heartening and humbling; physicians, staff, teams and PCNs demonstrated their ability to pivot under pressure and adapt to the changing needs of patients and the system as a whole.

Physicians continue to partner with their PCNs, using COVID access clinics and path-to-care plans to support patients. Specialists hosted the PCN [COVID tele-advice line](#) through the weekend as availability was expanded to seven days a week. The [COVID pathway](#) – updated this week – has also been a useful tool and has been downloaded more than 1,000 times. Both Calgary Zone initiatives have been scaled provincially.

These are just some examples of the work we have been privileged to witness. Sincere thanks for your continued dedication and commitment.

Yours sincerely,



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Medical Leader, Community Health Services  
Calgary Zone



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### Medical Home Q&A, with Dr. Christine Luelo

#### Q: What are the changes to the COVID pathway?

A: The [COVID pathway](#) was updated this week to include information about smoking and vaping, with evidence showing that even temporary cessation may reduce susceptibility to and the severity of COVID-19. The pathway also references improved access to nicotine replacement therapy. Further refinements

were made in response to feedback received during [Monday's webinar](#) to clarify that the pathway is intended for presumed and confirmed positive COVID patients, those with Influenza-like illness symptoms – until a swab result is obtained – and patients with a negative swab who present with strong clinical suspicion for COVID-19. A reminder that in terms of daily monitoring, the touch base for most patients will be quick; team may be able to help. Reassuring your patients can make a big difference; use your supportive communication skills. Watch this space for updates on EMR templates. If you are in a group practice, consider a clinic strategy for COVID calls. Smaller practices could consider reaching out to their PCN. If you have patients in continuing care facilities, consider asking on-site staff to conduct a daily assessment and report back by fax if all clear.

**Q. What's the latest on imaging?**

**A:** The message from Diagnostic Imaging (DI) continues to be that if it can wait, it should wait. Patients with scheduled appointments should wear a mask; masks are provided to those without one. Most providers have set aside time slots for vulnerable patients who need outpatient imaging. Community DI providers cannot see COVID presumed or confirmed patients, with one exception. Currently, the only COVID X-ray clinic is Mayfair Diagnostics, South Calgary Health (see the new [Community Diagnostic Imaging FAQ](#)). Referring physicians are asked to call in advance and patients also need to call the facility prior to entering. Chest X-rays are not useful for management of COVID and should only be undertaken at the advice of the Specialist LINK COVID line or in ER settings (work-up of decompensating patients/acute care settings). Discussions about ultrasound locations for COVID patients are ongoing.

**Q. With elective surgeries on hold, what support is available to help patients with non-COVID care?**

**A:** Family practice should continue to hold non-urgent referrals at this time. Consider writing the referral in your EMR and placing it on HOLD to send once the surge has passed and specialty clinics return to normal capacity. Consider seeking specialty advice through our [specialty access for primary care](#) document, which is updated frequently and lists access and supports for specialties/sub-specialties.

**Q: Is Specialist LINK operating as usual and which services are available?**

**A:** All tele-advice services are operating as usual at this time, which means physicians can request non-urgent advice during business hours from Monday to Friday. The COVID line is also available during the weekends, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. COVID is one of 10 tele-advice services that have been added in the past few weeks, bringing the total available to 36. The new lines are dermatology, child/adolescent and geriatric psychiatry, orthopaedic surgery, general internal medicine, cardiac surgery, breastfeeding, hematology and infectious disease. Read the new [Specialist LINK user guide](#) for a list of services.

**Q: Is there a new process for ordering PPE?**

**A:** The ordering process for primary care PPE has not changed (contact your PCN). [PPE information](#)

**Other updates:**

**1) PCN COVID-19 webinar:** Thank you once again to all those who tuned in to Monday's PCN COVID-19 education event/webinar, the fourth in the series. The livestream attracted more than 900 views. | [Edited video: April 20 webinar](#) | [Physician Q&A: Dr. David, Dr. Han](#) | Slides: [Public health – Dr. Jia Hu](#) | [Mental health – Dr. Chong](#) | [Toolkit](#) | [Medical Home – Dr. Luelo](#) | [COVID pathway – Dr. Ward](#)

**2) Register for the next PCN webinar:** Monday, May 4, from 6-8 p.m. [Register here](#).

**3) U of C CME: COVID Corner -- Care of the Hospitalized Patient with COVID-19:** Wednesday, April 22 at 7 p.m. [Register here](#). Recorded webinars are in the [archive](#).

**4) AMA webinar:** Meeting patients' needs – A stepwise approach to delivering care for primary and specialty care clinics. Friday, April 24, 12-1:30 p.m. [Register here](#).

Links: [Throat swab memo](#) | [Autopsies memo](#) | [Notify labs of office closures/reduced hours](#)

**More information:** Please forward any questions or concerns to [jake.jennings@calgaryareapcns.ca](mailto:jake.jennings@calgaryareapcns.ca).