

Pandemic RESPONSE

COVID-19 in the Calgary Zone: PCN update #13 – June 3, 2020

Medical Home Q&A with Dr. Christine Luelo

Q. I'm confused about what's happening with PPE ordering. Can you explain?

Discussions are continuing behind the scenes about the issues related to providing personal protective equipment to family physicians, not the least of which is cost. At the time of writing there's no definitive update on pricing, processes and timelines. This is frustrating and concerning for family physicians, staff, PCNs and all those working in primary care. What we know is that Alberta Health Services has agreed to source PPE for family doctors, based on the [memo issued last week](#). Pricing, payment and processes related to ordering are still being discussed. We had hoped to provide an update in this newsletter but will of course let you know as soon as more information is released. Your local PCN will also be in touch.

[Alberta Biz Connect](#) | [PPE guidelines](#) | [Rapid Response Platform](#) | [ATB Nexus](#) | [Business continuity](#)

Q. How do I shift gears in my practice to go from virtual appointments to a hybrid model?

Out of necessity, physicians pivoted almost overnight to telephone and video appointments for the majority of their patients. For the most part, patients responded favourably. The challenge now is to pivot back to more in-person care when virtual won't cut it. In some cases patients may need support to feel comfortable and safe in returning to your office. Your staff may need coaching on the language they need to use, and a script can be useful for consistency. In other cases patients may prefer the convenience of virtual appointments – in which case you may need to broker a different conversation. Either way, you will need to adjust your scheduling to avoid making access more challenging. Consider reserving dedicated blocks of time for virtual care so that you can work remotely. Make sure your "time to third next" for an in-person visit is not degraded by the virtual care you are doing. Discuss the flow of patients in your office with your partners. Most of all, be ready to pivot again in the event that case numbers increase and public health measures are reintroduced. Don't stop thinking about other tools for virtual care. The Government announced a [secure messaging tool](#) that is being funded via a grant. Maybe it's a fit for you, or maybe you want to use one embedded in your electronic medical record (the Alberta Medical Association has lots of great advice on this). In the long term, messaging options open up new avenues for safely connecting with patients that may result in you having more room for a new colleague in your space. It could potentially help future-proof your team for whatever COVID-19 throws at us next! [AMA virtual care hub](#) | [Billing codes](#) | [Virtual care toolkit](#) | [Fit for work screening](#)

Q. With the government handing out free non-medical masks at drive-thru locations, what advice are you offering patients about mask use in public?

When it comes to the general public, to mask or not to mask – that is the million-dollar question! The upside is that masks are a source control measure for those who are shedding the virus and may infect others. The wider, asymptomatic testing underway in Alberta should help us to have a much clearer understanding of this risk. The downside is that wearing masks can be uncomfortable and may actually increase risk (donning and doffing), if not used correctly. They also don't protect the wearer (that would require PPE) and they can give people the impression they don't need to keep their distance or wash their hands as frequently. There is guidance available, which will be helpful as the government starts to distribute free masks to all Albertans. [Masks for Albertans: An overview](#) | [Guidance: Wearing non-medical masks](#) | [Making masks](#) | [Continuous masking in a healthcare setting](#)

Q. Now that asymptomatic testing is available, are you recommending patients take advantage of it before visiting elderly or vulnerable friends or relatives?

So, your patient is asymptomatic and figures if they test negative they are safe to visit relatives? Wrong! Asymptomatic testing is a public health tool, not a clinical decision-making tool. It allows us to better understand the prevalence of COVID-19 in the population. If you test negative at 9 a.m. on Monday and have symptoms the next day -- after hearing your test was negative -- you will need a new test. As (Chief Medical Officer of Health) Dr. Deena Hinshaw has said, this is a snapshot in time. After exposure it can take up to 14 days for symptoms to present (in most cases they present by day six). [COVID-19 asymptomatic testing poster](#) | [Testing expansion information](#)

Q. I'm starting to see the effects of social isolation in my patients, both young and old. What support is available as mental health and financial issues come to the fore?

This pandemic was built for introverts like me! But even I am starting to itch for some real people time! The Calgary Zone had been working on mental health services via grant funding prior to COVID-19, and recently received funding to support COVID-19-related issues. Some services I find helpful include 211, [Kids Help Phone](#), [Calgary connecteen](#), [Access Mental Health](#) and PCN programs. The family violence information line is available at 310-1818. Alberta's sexual violence line is 1-866-403-8000.

Q. I enjoyed the PCN webinar series. Are there any plans to bring the webinars back?

The Calgary Zone leadership group was pleased the webinars were well attended and attracted a lot of positive feedback. We are currently working on plans for a new series that could potentially include a monthly webinar. The goal is to continue to provide physicians with a platform for discussions, while offering updates on COVID-19, our mental health group's work and other Calgary Zone initiatives including Specialist LINK. Watch this space for more details. [PCN webinar: May 25](#) | [PCN webinar series](#) | [PCN primary care pathway](#) | [Hospital discharge pathway](#)

Other updates

1 33 new non-urgent advice options at your fingertips

Family physicians in the Calgary area can now access non-urgent advice from more than 70 specialty groups thanks to a rapid expansion of the services available via Specialist LINK and eReferral Advice Requests. Thirty-three new groups have been added in 2020 alone – including 30 on Specialist LINK.

Please refer to this [quick reference guide to non-urgent advice](#) in the Calgary Zone. Requesting tele-advice is simple: Visit specialistlink.ca, click on the appropriate service and leave a direct number or cell. Advice can also be requested by calling 403-910-2551. Calls are returned within one hour. Please have your practice ID and the patient's Personal Health Number at hand. Visit albertanetcare.ca/ereferral.htm for eReferral Advice Requests. Electronic advice is available within five days.

2 Pediatric otolaryngology, geriatric medicine added

The newest non-urgent advice options to be added include geriatric medicine (eReferral Advice Request) and pediatric otolaryngology (Specialist LINK), which both started earlier this week. A geriatric medicine access pathway is also available at specialistlink.ca. The other most recent additions to Specialist LINK are medical oncology and four related sub-specialties. [Specialist LINK tele-advice user guide](#)

3 Testing, testing

As mentioned above, testing has been expanded to include all Albertans, whether they are symptomatic or not. Testing can be booked online for some locations via ahs.ca/covid or by calling 811. Drop-in testing was launched at the Richmond Road Diagnostic and Treatment Centre in south west Calgary earlier this week. It is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. AHS has introduced voluntary asymptomatic testing in emergency departments and urgent care centres. [Test results](#) | [Online self-assessment tool](#)

4 Reclaiming your office practice webinar

The College of Family Physicians of Canada is hosting a webinar on reclaiming your office practice during the pandemic. It will take place Thursday, June 4, at 10 a.m. MT. Join via [Facebook](#) or [YouTube](#). The University of Calgary has a number of upcoming webinars related to COVID-19. [More information](#)