

Local doctors share evolving action plan, COVID-19

By Dr. Conde

We are currently living in an unprecedented time and I wish to take this opportunity to update community members and patients on our evolving action plan at both Big Country Hospital and Oyen Medical Clinic concerning COVID-19.

Firstly, I would like to reassure members of the public that I have faith in the speed at which measures have been put in place to help reduce the spread of this disease. These are anxiety-provoking times I know, but if we approach our 'new normal' sensibly and with compassion I am confident we will reduce the impact that this disease will have on our community.

How COVID-19 is spread

COVID-19 is a virus. It is spread through 'contact and droplet' which means that when you cough, sneeze and touch objects which are then touched by other people, you are at risk of spreading the disease. This is why self-isolation is so important if you are having symptoms.

Symptoms

Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary in severity. Typically, it may present in similar ways to the common cold or even influenza; cough, fever, fatigue, etc. It can result in breathlessness. While most people will make a full recovery from this virus, a small but significant number of people can go on to develop a severe illness which may be life-threatening.

It is now at pandemic levels, meaning that it has spread across the world, and in Alberta, we are likely to see significant increases in numbers over the coming days and weeks.

Follow the guidelines on self-isolation

This places strain on the health care system both in terms of patient load as well

as reduced workforce. Following the AHS/government guidelines on self-isolation will reduce the impact on both of these factors. At the risk of sounding dramatic, staying home will save lives; so do it.

Ensuring safe, effective care to everyone

We are doing everything that we can in the hospital and clinic to ensure safe, effective care to everyone. We have an isolation room set up for assessment of possible cases at the hospital.

We have an action plan for patients presenting to the clinic.

The provincial guidelines will be evaluated on a day-to-day basis and I would encourage everyone to

access www.alberta.ca/COVID-19 regularly to stay up to date with these. This webpage is excellent and includes information on everything including what to do if you have symptoms, who should self isolate and who can be visited in hospital.

Importantly, it is on this page that you can find the online self-assessment for symptoms. Using this tool if you have symptoms will provide you with clear instructions, as well as freeing up essential health care resources for seriously unwell patients.

There are also regular live updates, usually delivered in the afternoon, by our Chief Medical Officer Dr. Hinshaw on the YouTube channel Your Alberta.

How we deliver service

In terms of how we will deliver service here in Oyen, this will likely change on a day-to-day basis over the coming weeks.

Dr. Tam is currently on vacation in Australia. After his 14-day self-isolation, we are hoping to have him back at work by mid-April.

For the time being, this leaves just me and Dr. Muller. Please be patient with us. We know you are used to us running behind schedule! This will certainly not improve any time soon.

Behind the scenes

A lot of work is going on behind the scenes to keep everyone as healthy as possible. We are extremely dedicated to this community and will be working very hard over the coming months to ensure a high standard of care in the face of this current crisis.

At the clinic

At the clinic, we will be offering telephone consultations to all patients who are in self-isolation either because of symptoms, travel history or even if you are self-isolating out of an abundance of caution. We may not always be able to provide care over the phone, but we will make a judgment on a case-by-case basis regarding whether or not you need to come to the clinic or ER.

We can discuss routine prescription refills in this way as well as simple follow up of test results and minor illness.

When and who not to call

If you have general questions regarding COVID-19, please **DO NOT** call the clinic, but instead, read the websites mentioned above.

I would also like to mention that it is only Dr. Muller and I who can give you medical advice by telephone. Please do not contact our nurses at the hospital for routine health advice.

The 811 telephone line is another avenue for support regarding specific medical questions.

We are blessed to live in a small community and a number of our patients are also our friends. Many of you have personal contact information for myself, Dr. Muller, nurses or EMTs. We ask that you **PLEASE** refrain from reaching out to any of our local health care team by personal text or phone call for medical advice. We will be extremely stretched in this current climate and we do not have the resources to offer sound medical advice in this manner. Please, no matter how close a friend you might be, access the resources out-

lined above.

Some appointments can be postponed

At this time, if you have a routine physical already scheduled you can attend appointments as planned if you wish. However, moving forward we would suggest that unless you have a specific medical concern or chronic disease, routine/annual physicals can be postponed for the time being.

Our phone lines could be busier than usual

When you do phone the clinic for an appointment, our clinic staff will be asking you a series of questions to ensure that everyone is kept as safe as possible.

We have rooms set up for isolation of low-risk symptomatic patients, as well as a separate waiting area for asymptomatic but immunocompromised patients. With these extra screening questions in mind, please be patient if our phone lines are busier than usual.

Only essential visits

We are aware that having a loved one in the hospital or long-term care can be very distressing and we truly sympathize with that. However, please be extremely mindful of the risk that visitors can pose to these most vulnerable people.



Dr. Muller and Dr. Conde

Even if you have very mild or perhaps no symptoms, there is a risk of disease spread.

Provincial guidelines currently recommend attendance be kept to only essential visits. Perhaps now is the time to introduce Great-Grandma to the perks of FaceTime?

I hope that this information provides some clarity in the current situation. As I said, this plan is evolving

and will change regularly. I will endeavour to keep everyone as updated as I can on healthcare in our community, but once again for provincial advice visit www.alberta.ca/COVID-19.

As I said at the beginning, a sensible and compassionate approach is what is needed for the coming months.

We only need so much toilet paper. Now go wash your hands!



Oyen RCMP advise Highway 9 detours due to semi-truck single vehicle collision clean up

Oyen, Alta. – On March 12, 2020, at approximately 5:45 a.m., Oyen RCMP received a call of a semi-truck and trailer that was in the ditch with an engine on fire. The semi-truck had attempted to avoid a collision with a deer and went off the road. The driver is not injured.

Oyen RCMP and fire services remained on scene until late afternoon. It is not believed that the trailer had dangerous goods on board; however, out of an abundance of caution, the area was closed to traffic during clean up.

Traffic on Highway 9 was diverted at Highway 41 and Secondary Highway 886 for approximately one hour.




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