

MESSAGE TO COMMUNITY

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Changes at Niagara Health to address need for increasing ICU capacity due to COVID-19

Niagara Health is undergoing a number of changes in Critical Care today to respond to significant healthcare system pressures in Niagara and across the province.

The number of ICU beds being filled by COVID-19 patients is at unprecedented levels and is anticipated to climb further. Although we are seeing signs of improvement in new cases in Niagara and in Ontario, we know activity in the hospital follows two to three weeks behind community COVID-19 activity and we need to be prepared for a surge in admissions at Niagara Health. In addition to our COVID-19 response, we need to ensure we have capacity to care for non-COVID-19 patients requiring critical care.

Over the last week we have increased the number of physicians and staff working in our ICUs. This has required a significant effort from our teams and has included redeploying staff from other areas to implement a team-based model of care that expands our staffing capacity and ensures we have enough skilled staff caring for our patients.

The next phase in our planning is to change the footprint for critical care services in St. Catharines to create more capacity for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. This includes opening 12 Level 3 ICU beds in the post-operative recovery area for additional acute COVID-19 patients. Post-operative patients will be cared for in another area.

We are currently caring for 82 COVID-19 patients including 24 in the ICU (19 patients in St. Catharines and five in Niagara Falls). Our overall ICU capacity is at 108% based on our regularly budgeted Pre-COVID-19 beds. In St. Catharines, our ICU capacity is at 121% and our Level 3 ICU capacity, the highest level of ICU care, is at 164%.

The province continues to direct hospitals to support critical care demands for those hospitals in the highest need/greatest affected areas. To date, we have accepted 60 patients total and today we are caring for 28 patients from outside Niagara (15 in our wards and 13 in Critical Care).

Change is taking place at a rapid pace and we appreciate the community's support. Please continue to follow public health measures including masking, physical distancing, handwashing, having contact with members of your household only and getting the first vaccine that is available to you.