Supporting Local Response to a Community Evacuation

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is committed to supporting a Local Authority’s response to a community evacuation by providing timely and appropriate services. Recognizing that evacuations occurring during the provincial response to COVID-19 require additional guidance and support from AHS, this document provides:

- Guidance regarding the process to notify AHS and to request AHS support.
- Supplementary guidance for local authorities identifying, planning for and operating reception centres in a COVID-19 environment, and;
- Supplementary guidance around health supports for community evacuations in a COVID-19 environment.

Notifying and Requesting Support from AHS

When an evacuation is occurring or expected to occur, local authorities may notify AHS:

- By contacting AHS Emergency/Disaster Management via the Single Point of Contact at 1-844-755-1788 or edp@ahs.ca, or:
- Through the Health Duty Desk at the Provincial Operations Centre, or;
- Through existing local communication channels/processes established in advance of the evacuation (e.g. municipal EOC connection to AHS zone EOC).

Once AHS has been notified of the evacuation, AHS will work to determine impacts on AHS facilities and services and will work with the local authority to determine how AHS will support the evacuation.

Guiding Principles for Reception Centres in a COVID-19 Environment

The key principles in the Reception Centres: A Guide for Municipalities document continue to apply in a COVID-19 environment. Additionally, local authorities should:

- Select lodging options that promote physical distancing between evacuees (e.g. hotels/motels, dormitories).
  - Group lodging (e.g. cots in a large open space) should be considered only as a last resort. Where local authority planning indicates that group lodging will be required to accommodate evacuees, AHS should be engaged early in the planning process to provide specific guidance.
- Where possible and appropriate, identify multiple lodging options to separate evacuees based on both COVID-19 risk and levels of health/social services needs. Consider appropriate accommodations for:
  - Individuals and families who have no symptoms and are not required to self-isolate;
  - Individuals and families who are required by Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) order to self-isolate because they have COVID-19 symptoms; have tested positive for COVID-19; are close contacts of confirmed cases; or because they have returned from travel outside of Canada (hotel
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accommodation should be prioritized for this group wherever possible);
- Individuals and families with higher levels of health needs and vulnerability to COVID-19 because of age or pre-existing health conditions;
- Individuals and families with higher levels of health and social service needs because of homelessness or housing insecurity, and;
- Other community-specific, needs-based categories.

- Register evacuees either virtually (by phone/online) or using a drive-through model that allows evacuees and registration staff to maintain physical distancing throughout the registration process.
- Work with local social service providers to develop processes to allow evacuees to access services virtually or physically distanced, wherever possible. This includes: food, laundry, waste services, pet services, aids to daily living and wellness supports.

Responding to Evacuee Health Needs

AHS support for evacuee health needs will be based upon the nature of the event and available community capacity. In some cases, the health needs of evacuees can be met with existing community resources. Where required and appropriate, AHS may provide:

- Evacuee health screening guidance or support, including assessment for COVID-19 risk and public health follow-up with individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have been evacuated;
- Referral and general healthcare wayfinding to connect individuals and families with appropriate health services within the community, and;
- On-site health services including medical assessment and treatment and, if appropriate, COVID testing or referral.

AHS will also make arrangements directly with existing clients (e.g. home care, addiction and mental health) to facilitate access to required services during the evacuation.

In the COVID-19 environment, many areas of AHS are operating with reduced staffing availability. This may impact the ability of AHS to provide health services during evacuation.

Congregate Living/Health Facility Evacuation

When engaging in evacuation planning with congregate lodging facilities (e.g. shelters, group homes, lodges), local authorities must also consider that in the COVID-19 environment, neighbouring facilities that are experiencing an outbreak will not be able to accept evacuated residents/clients. This may limit options for some local authorities, requiring additional planning to identify multiple alternate receiving facilities that can provide an appropriate level of care. Refer to the list of Outbreaks in Alberta for more information (updated on Tuesday and Friday each week).
In the event that evacuation of an AHS-operated health facility is required, AHS will coordinate the transportation and relocation of patients and clients. AHS sites will work directly with local authorities to identify and coordinate required supports.

**Accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to support Evacuation**

Physical distancing measures should be incorporated into evacuation planning as the most important measure local authorities can take to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission during the evacuation process. In the event that physical distancing measures are not possible (e.g. during bus transportation), local authorities may need to provide PPE to responders and evacuees to support a safe evacuation.

Local authority requests for PPE should be submitted to the Provincial Operations Centre (POC) using the online form established for this purpose: [https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/ppe](https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/ppe).

In the event PPE is urgently required and POC is not able to fulfill the request, AHS support may be requested via the Health Duty Desk at the POC or via the AHS Zone Emergency Operations Centre.

**Disclosure of Health Information**

AHS must adhere to the confidentiality provisions of Alberta’s privacy laws and the *Public Health Act*, which prevents disclosure of individual health information, such as COVID-19 status, “in any manner that would be detrimental to the personal interest, reputation or privacy of the patient.” AHS may only disclose health information in specific circumstances, such as “when the disclosure will avert or minimize an imminent danger to the health or safety of any person.”

Given the community transmission of COVID-19 that is occurring, it is important for local authorities to be aware there may be individuals who are COVID-19 positive and unaware, or individuals who are pre-symptomatic and capable of transmitting COVID-19.

Measures should be in place for physical distancing as part of the evacuation and relocation process to reduce the risk of transmission. Where physical distancing is not possible, responders and evacuees should be take additional precautions (e.g. PPE) to reduce the risk of transmission. These measures need to occur **regardless** of data available on the COVID status of individual residents or numbers of cases in small geographic areas.
Resources

The following resources are available to help guide local authorities in planning for evacuation in a COVID-19 environment:

- AHS “COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Hotels, Hostels, and Inns”
- AHS “Reception Centres: A Guide for Municipalities” Guidance Document:
  [https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eph-reception-centres-municipalities.pdf](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eph-reception-centres-municipalities.pdf)
- AHS “Shelter Guidance: Preventing, Controlling and Managing COVID-19”:
  [PDF](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-outbreak-shelter.pdf)
- COVID-19 Outbreaks In Alberta: [https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx#p25721s5](https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx#p25721s5)
- Provincial Operations Centre (POC) PPE Request Form: [https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/ppe](https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/ppe)