

May 31, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Re: Resuming Lung Testing Services in Alberta During COVID-19*

This letter is in follow-up to our correspondence dated March 22, 2020, which was meant to offer the best available clinical guidance to support you in time-sensitive efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Please consider the guidance within that original document as replaced with more current guidance available from Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA).

In addition to CPSA's detailed guidance, the following may be helpful:

Keeping Current on Restrictions

While risks to patients and staff have not returned back to baseline, Alberta's CMOH has indicated that certain testing and consult services can resume. Going forward, Alberta's CMOH and the CPSA will indicate which restrictions are being lifted and those that remain in place. Please carefully apply their advice at each stage of relaunch. For services provided within AHS, each Zone's Emergency Operations Centre (ZEOC) will guide ambulatory care relaunch.

On May 4, CPSA released a statement about resuming services in alignment with the CMOH's order 16-2020. On May 11 (revised May 20), CPSA circulated its detailed guidance which can be found here: <http://www.cpsa.ca/resources-for-physicians-during-covid-19/#Facilities> and <https://www.carta.ca/news/news/2020/cpsa-guidance-documents-for-pft-and-sleep-labs.aspx>.

CPSA will continue to update this guidance as needed, including when restricted testing may resume (e.g. exercise testing, nebulization, and bronchial challenge tests). For those with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, see the important details in the 'Pre-examination' section of the CPSA guidance document (see links above).

Prescreening for symptoms and risk factors related to COVID-19, done with every patient and before initiating testing or consults, is an important component of preventing the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Routine PPE:

- Follow CPSA and Alberta Health's guidance on routine practices for every patient, perform **hand hygiene before and after every patient** as well as a patient care risk assessment. Wear a **surgical/procedure mask continuously**, at all times and in all areas of your workplace if you are involved in direct patient contact or cannot maintain adequate social distancing from patients and co-workers. These measures are to be used with every patient (regardless of their health status or infection risk), and are designed to protect both staff and patients.
- Use additional PPE based on a Point of Care Risk Assessment with every patient.

*These recommendations are based on current evidence, and may be revised as new evidence becomes available.

- A facility or service program may implement PPE and exposure control measures beyond the minimum requirements.
- Alberta Health Personal Protective Equipment Guideline For Care Of Individuals With Suspect Or Confirmed COVID-19 in Health Care Settings can be found at:
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-healthcare-ppc-guidance.pdf>

AGMP/N95:

- In our March document, it was suggested to consider any form of lung testing to be an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP), thus indicating the need for a fit-tested N95 respirator instead of a surgical/procedure mask during AGMP. Given the benefit of more rigorous review of current evidence and experience, AHS' provincial Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) now guides that a fit-tested N95 respirator is indicated only for lung testing where aerosolized medication is applied (e.g. methacholine challenge) or in the absence of a high-efficiency exhalation filter in the test circuit.
- Detail can be found here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17091.aspx>. Questions can be submitted to ppe@ahs.ca.
- We recognize that these recommendations may differ somewhat from other jurisdictions. AHS' IPC has carefully reviewed the available evidence. Given the mode of transmission for the COVID-19 virus, IPC suggests limited use of N95 (i.e. only during high risk procedures or AGMPs for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19).

Safely don and doff PPE:

- Video: https://ahamms01.https.internapcdn.net/ahamms01/Content/AHS_Website/modules/ipc-guide-to-ppe-update/story.html
- Learning Module:
https://ahamms01.https.internapcdn.net/ahamms01/Content/AHS_Website/modules/ipc/ipc-ppe-and-you/story_html5.html

Use of Salbutamol

The backorder for salbutamol MDIs is currently lifted. At this time, there are no anticipated supply issues, either within AHS' stores or within the province's wholesalers. As such, post-bronchodilator studies may be performed where indicated. The province continues to monitor the impact of future COVID-19 waves and relaunch stages, and will inform us of any changes to medication availability.

Triaging

CMOH order 16-2020 requires screening patients before interactions to ensure that the probability of encountering a high-risk patient in a community healthcare setting is low. Each service's medical director should determine the best strategies to use with respect to screening and triaging, in accordance with the types of service deemed allowable at each of the various stages of relaunch. It is reasonable for medical directors to review and revise the service's definition of 'urgent,' 'semi-urgent,' etc. as needed. Further guidance is available on CPSA's website as well as other reputable sources.

Resources

The latest COVID-19 clinical details and patient resources (including translated posters) can always be accessed here:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16947.aspx>

<https://cts-sct.ca/covid-19/>

<https://www.alberta.ca/prevent-the-spread.aspx#toc-6>

Please stay safe and keep well!

Respectfully,

Dr. Dale Lien
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Medicine SCN™