



CURRENT PRIORITIES IN PRIMARY CARE: CONSIDERATIONS FOR FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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Introduction

Ontario is facing unprecedented pressure on acute care beds and ICUs in hospitals, and is in a race to vaccinate amid surging COVID-19 variants.

With our health system focused on preventing COVID-19 infections, caring for sick patients, maintaining ongoing patient care, and alleviating system stress – notably in hospitals – **family physicians face the added challenge of balancing priorities.**

As we manage through this tough period and address areas of burgeoning medical need, we are mindful of our collective exhaustion and the need to **care for ourselves and each other.**

Here are some considerations for prioritizing the multiple demands right now – with emphasis on family physicians **providing needed in-person care, supporting vaccination efforts, and monitoring COVID patients at home.**

Public Health focus is on implementing control measures, contact tracing and managing local vaccination efforts – the latter often in partnership **with family doctors.**



Care Focus

In balancing competing demands and constrained capacity, the following are key areas of focus (further details on page 2).



- Help our patients stay well in the community and, as reinforced by the Ministry of Health, [out of hospital](#).
 - ✓ Continue our essential role in patient care, and **do not delay in-person care when needed.**
 - ✓ According to your practice model and capacity, make available **after-hours care** for your patients.
 - ✓ Provide care for **acute, emergent, and new conditions** – manage acute issues in the community wherever possible and safe to do so.
 - ✓ Maintain [high-impact prevention strategies](#), such as cancer screening and immunization – prioritizing those at higher risk.
 - ✓ COVID-19 monitoring/care.

Questions? Email ocfp@ocfp.on.ca

For more information: ontariofamilyphysicians.ca/covid19





COVID-19 Focus

- **Inform and educate** your patients about vaccination. [Briefs from the Science Advisory Table](#), this [CEP resource page](#), and these [vaccines FAQs](#) can help answer questions. 
- **Vaccinate where possible**, and especially those who cannot reach mass vaccination clinics. [Patients trust their family doctors](#), although not all family practices will have capacity to vaccinate – see this OMA [decision guide](#) (gated) to assess your in-office capacity, and reach out to your local [PHU/Primary Care](#) contact if you wish to vaccinate. 
- Care for COVID-19 **patients in the community**:
 - ✓ If able, participate in a [COVID@Home](#) program to help manage patients discharged from hospital with mild to moderate COVID-19 – especially in hard-hit communities.
 - ✓ Support your COVID-19 patients at home. Hamilton Family Medicine has compiled practical [resources](#) for assessing, monitoring and managing COVID-19; FAQs about [long COVID here](#).
- If your current practice needs permit:
 - ✓ Support **COVID-19 testing and assessment** efforts, guided by the priorities of your Public Health unit.
 - ✓ Support **hospital care of COVID-19 patients** if requested, as noted in this [provincial order](#) to help our overburdened hospitals.



Priorities for In-Person Care

- As also referenced by the CPSO, patients need to be seen in person*:
 - ✓ Where physical contact is necessary to provide care (e.g., newborn care, prenatal care);
 - ✓ Where physical assessments are necessary to make an appropriate diagnosis or treatment decision (e.g., undifferentiated conditions, physical examinations that cannot be done virtually, language barriers).
- Prioritize those at higher **social and medical risk**. COVID-19 prevalence should not preclude an in-office visit, provided it can be done safely. See the OCFP's [Considerations for Family Physicians: In-Person Visits When Phone/Video Isn't Enough](#).
- Conduct physical examinations when normally required before making referrals.
- Preventive care where we know the risk of delayed care to be high:
 - ✓ **Cancer screening**: prioritized by degree of overdue and/or patient's level of risk. Here is guidance on prioritization from OH-CCO: [Provider tipsheet](#) | [Provider webpage](#). 
 - ✓ **Immunizations and well-child visits**: Here is an [interim schedule for children and pregnant women during the pandemic](#). 
- A reminder that PPE allocations are still available from the provincial pandemic stockpile – [Q&A here](#).

*See this [CPSO summary](#) where it notes "ultimately, every practice is unique and so the right balance will require judgment on the part of physicians to determine how to best serve their patients' needs safely and appropriately".

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