



# NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

## NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Latest in our efforts against COVID-19 – Staged return to a ‘new normal’ proceeding steadily at NHH

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Tuesday, June 23rd, 2020**—Non-urgent surgeries, procedures and tests have begun to resume at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH), in step with the regional approval [received late last month](#).

Among the services that have ramped back up in the past two weeks in a staged plan developed by NHH’s Service Continuity and Planning Working Group are:

- surgical services (e.g. colonoscopies, cataracts, hernia repairs and selected gynecological procedures)
- selected diagnostic imaging procedures (e.g. CT exams, MRIs and ultrasounds);
- small volumes of in-person ambulatory care clinic appointments; and
- a limited number of [in-person community mental health appointments](#) through the walk-in counselling clinic at 1011 Elgin Street West, Cobourg.

On March 19, under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, the government of Ontario directed all acute care hospitals to ramp down elective surgeries and non-urgent activities in order to preserve system capacity to deal effectively with COVID-19.

As a result, only emergency and high-priority surgeries and imaging exams were performed at NHH for close to three months, while hundreds of other tests, appointments and procedures were postponed for safety reasons, or—if appropriate—provided virtually.

“Ramping down was something most members of our team have never done before,” said Susan Walsh, Vice President of Patient Services and Chief Nursing Executive. “This was a challenging time for both patients and NHH staff and physicians alike, as we had to adapt swiftly to the risks of a virus we are still learning about. Safety has continued to remain our guidepost and number one priority and, to that end, I’m very pleased we are now at the point in our region where we can begin to resume non-urgent hospital services.”

NHH is moving forward in two-week increments, resuming a service, or a portion of a service, monitoring patient flow to ensure the conditions required to safely ramp up remain in place—such as the appropriate levels of personal protective equipment, inpatient capacity and more—and inadvertent bottle necks do not occur to impact the necessary physical distancing requirements.

All of this must be done within the context of COVID-19, ensuring safe pathways of care for all, without the benefit of volunteers, who have not yet been permitted to return to hospital duties, in

part because of the need to minimize the number of individuals in the hospital to safely manage patient flow and physical distancing.

Beginning June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the second stage in NHH's plan, the hospital's third and final operating room suite will resume operation, and further diagnostic imaging and ambulatory care clinic procedures will also begin to be scheduled, including x-ray, mammography, nuclear medicine and interventional radiology procedures (specifically, joint injections and pain management).

Those awaiting surgery at NHH are being notified by the referring physician to arrange pre-operative COVID-19 testing, if required. Diagnostic imaging tests will be scheduled directly by the hospital. In all cases, pre-screening will also be conducted by hospital staff, by phone, to review a standard set of COVID-19 questions, provide logistical details, and answer any questions.

### **Accessing COVID-19 testing**

NHH's COVID-19 Assessment Centre continues to see high volumes of patients. Demand is expected to continue through 2020/21. To date the Centre has supported over 7,400 virtual and in-person visits, 1,973 of which were completed in collaboration with Northumberland Paramedics at a range of local locations, from area long-term care and retirement homes, to Alderville First Nation's Health and Social Services. Of those visits, swabs to test for COVID-19 have been completed on more than 4,400 individuals.

Relocated earlier this month from its original home in the Ambulatory Care Clinic space near the front entrance of the hospital to the former IM Care offices within the NHH Emergency Department, the Centre is currently open daily from 8 AM to 4PM. While walk-ins are accepted, it is strongly recommended that individuals call ahead to the Centre (**905-377-7783**) to schedule an assessment. This will help the team minimize wait times for all who need this service, and support physical distancing requirements. As always, if symptoms are severe, call 911 and alert the dispatcher to the potential concern regarding COVID-19 so they can be appropriately prepared.

### **Masks – Please wear them, and wear them well!**

Universal masking continues throughout NHH. Those coming into the hospital for an appointment or to the Emergency Department who already have a cloth mask in good, clean condition, are asked to bring it with them and plan to wear it throughout their visit. If worn properly, cloth masks help to cover your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating other people or surfaces around you.

Cloth masks (also referred to as a 'non-medical mask') are recommended in places where physical distancing (2 metres or 6 feet) is difficult, and this includes the hospital. If you do not have a cloth mask, NHH will provide one for you which you can take home and reuse. The blue, non-medical masks distributed to patients and visitors at NHH are being generously sewn by a small team of local volunteers using material designed for the sterilization of medical equipment. Thanks to the effort of these 'blue mask' volunteers, many medical-grade masks have been preserved for use by front-line health care providers. No mask is useful, however, unless it is worn and removed properly. [See this video](#) from the Government of Canada for information on how to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly to continue to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N) has also issued a call to area volunteers to sew additional cloth masks for distribution at health and social care agencies around the County. If you are available to sew and donate cloth masks to this campaign, please [see the related media release here](#). Thank you to all who have contributed to this OHT-N mask campaign to date.

## **Food and drink restrictions**

Please refrain from bringing food and drink into the hospital when coming in for an appointment or to the Emergency Department. NHH requires masks to be worn by all who are able to tolerate them and, as such, food and drinks cannot be safely consumed.

## **Hand hygiene**

Whether visiting NHH or out and about in the community, washing your hands often is one of the best ways to minimize the spread of potentially dangerous germs. Wash your hands frequently, preferably with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.

For the latest news on COVID-19, and links to useful local, regional and provincial resources, please see our website: [www.nhh.ca/covid-19](http://www.nhh.ca/covid-19)

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**About Northumberland Hills Hospital** – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, NHH delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, obstetrical care and palliative care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care and rehabilitation. Mental health care, chemotherapy, dialysis and 16 other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists. NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs approximately 600 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians and volunteers. NHH is an active member of Ontario Health (East) – formerly the Central East Local Health Integration Network. For more information, please visit [www.nhh.ca](http://www.nhh.ca) or follow us on Twitter [@NorHillsHosp](https://twitter.com/NorHillsHosp).

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