

March 24, 2020

We write to you — our community, our patients, and friends — during this unprecedented time. We now face a public health crisis unlike any that we have experienced in our lifetimes. The extent of the coronavirus in our province and across the country has become more clear, and more sobering. As with many public health issues, this one is both highly complicated and rapidly evolving. The safety and wellbeing of our staff, physicians, volunteers and that of those we serve, is paramount.

Our role, as hospitals, in this pandemic is to remain open and ready to care for the most ill in our community. Fortunately, most people who contract the virus will not need hospitalization. For those who do, we must and will be here to provide 24-hour care even under the most dire circumstances. If you or someone you know has symptoms of COVID-19: new cough, difficulty breathing and fever, the first thing to do is to stay home so you do not pass the virus to anyone else. Go online to the Middlesex London Health Unit at <https://www.healthunit.com/novel-coronavirus#FAQs> for further instructions. If your symptoms are worsening and you feel unsafe at home, call the hospital to alert us that you are coming or present to the emergency room for evaluation.

It is important to note that there is no specific treatment for coronaviruses such as COVID-19.

If you have not traveled, but are concerned about your symptoms, we encourage you to contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider/family doctor; this will help keep our emergency room resources available for emergent care patients. Please only call 9-1-1 if you are severely unwell.

Travellers returning to Canada who develop new symptoms within 14 days of their return should contact your local public health unit (Southwestern Public Health at 1-800-922-0096, Middlesex London Health Unit at 519-663-5317) or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or your primary care provider/physician for further assessment and guidance.

There are many challenges for all hospitals and including rationing of personal protective equipment from the distributors and manufacturers, the possibility of staff becoming ill and unable to work, and limited testing capability. That being said, we are working both locally and regionally to plan for increased demand beyond our current levels of preparedness.

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) has adopted a number of measures to protect the public, patients, their families, and members of the MHA from the potential transmission of the COVID-19 including:

- restricting visitors – maximum 1 visitor per patient per day, and only for critical and palliative cases, as well as one guardian for children presenting to the emergency department
- postponing elective surgeries until further notice,
- reducing ambulatory care services until further notice,
- access to both hospital sites is restricted to the emergency department for both patients and visitors
- radiology services are being provided for urgent cases

We appreciate your understanding as we make changes to reduce the spread of the virus - changes that we recognize create inconvenience. Thank you for your understanding, flexibility and patience.

We appreciate all you are doing to follow the critically important suggestions from credible sources such as Ontario Public Health. If you have not yet adopted these strategies, we urge you to do so! Precautions like hand washing, social distancing, staying at home if you are ill will help slow the spread of the disease. We need everyone to follow these directives. By everyone doing all you can to reduce the spread, you not only protect yourself and your loved ones, but you also help us better meet the needs of those who do become sick.

At MHA, and at every health care organization, we are always preparing for emergencies, and that preparation is serving us well right now. BUT this is different. MHA is here for you. We are adopting best practices, based on the most current information and resources from Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Public Health Ontario.

We are in awe and proud of our staff and physicians who have stepped up in so many ways during these unprecedented times. We know how caring, committed and skilled our workforce is. To see them continue to care so well for patients and for each other is extremely gratifying. In addition to the clinical staff, we also want to recognize all the non-clinical and support staff who are also working very hard through this crisis. Their contributions are invaluable.

If readers are looking for things they can do: expressions of support and appreciation from the community would mean so much to our staff and physicians during this time. If you would like to reach out to them, please share your comments at shoutout@mha.tvh.ca and we will ensure your messages are seen by our staff.

Lastly, even though it's being said in so many places, the importance of following all the public health guidelines very strictly, including social/physical distancing is critical. We need you to do your part.

Thank you for helping us help you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ian Ferguson". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Dr. Ian Ferguson
MHA Chief of Staff

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Todd Stepanuk". The signature is cursive and includes a large loop at the end.

Todd Stepanuk
MHA President & CEO