



Doctors Manitoba Issues Red Alert

Physicians warn hospital space will prove inadequate if Manitobans don't act now to stop the spread of COVID-19

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As Code Red restrictions start today in Winnipeg, Manitoba's physicians are issuing a Red Alert to urge all Manitobans to act now to stop the spread of COVID-19. Without these actions, hospital resources could be overwhelmed within days.

"We know Manitobans step up when others are in need, with unparalleled generosity donating blood during shortages and lifting sandbags during floods," said Dr. Cory Baillie, President of Doctors Manitoba. "This is another emergency situation and physicians from across our province are calling on all Manitobans to act now to save the lives of their families, friends and neighbours. Please stay home and limit contact with people outside of your household."

Manitoba is now firmly in the middle of the second wave of COVID-19, with increasing levels of community spread that risk pushing hospitals and ICUs past their limits.

ICU physician Dr. Kendiss Olafson echoes the red alert call: "Our goal is to have open ICU beds at each of the three acute hospitals at all times, but over the last week we have been nearly full, at times with only one or two beds open across the entire city, " she explains. "Maintaining open beds means we are ready for the next incoming trauma, septic patient or individual struggling to breathe, because minutes matter in life-threatening situations."

Dr. Olafson pointed out that hospitalizations and ICU admissions for COVID-19 are not just limited to the elderly, with about half occurring in patients under the age of 65.

Physicians are urging Manitobans to follow the advice of Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's Chief Provincial Public Health Officer. His advice includes going further than the code red restrictions that start today in Winnipeg. These steps include:

- Staying home whenever possible to limit contact with those outside of your household. If you can work from home, please do.
- Designate one individual in your household to run only essential errands, such as grocery shopping.
- Wear a mask at all times when outside of your home.
- Wash your hands frequently and stay six feet away from people outside of your household.
- Stay home if you are sick, even with mild symptoms, and get tested.

"I am urging all Manitobans to do what it takes to stop the spread of COVID-19, because your actions today can help save the life of your grandparent, parent, neighbour or friend," added Dr. Olafson who also holds a Master's in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. "The rate of infection, hospitalization and death we are seeing today will be the tip of the iceberg if nothing changes."

The patients admitted to hospital and ICU today were likely infected with coronavirus a couple of weeks ago, when Manitoba's new case counts had just started to rise over 100 per day and our test positivity rate was still under 5%. With hundreds of cases now being announced daily and a test positivity rate approaching 10%, Manitoba's physicians are very worried hospital capacity will be overwhelmed within days.

"What's encouraging among all this is that we know how to stop this, and western Manitoba showed us those steps can work," Dr. Baillie added. "Physicians know that staying home and limiting your contact with family and friends is difficult, especially during a time when we are worried about each other's well-being. We know that limiting business activity and faith-based gatherings is a major sacrifice. We would not be calling on all Manitobans to step up like this if it wasn't absolutely necessary."