

GOVERNMENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK UPDATE

Bulletin #3 g: COVID-19 GNB news release from March 17

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Update on COVID-19

FREDERICTON (GNB) – The following update on COVID-19 (the novel coronavirus) was issued today by Dr. Jennifer Russell, chief medical officer of health:

The health and well-being of New Brunswickers is our top priority. Staying home will reduce direct contact with New Brunswickers. Everyone has a responsibility to stay home and go out only for essentials.

In an effort to allow 811 health-care professionals to support more people who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, the Department of Health has authorized physicians to see their patients “virtually” for routine services such as prescription renewals and providing follow-up health advice. You can receive care and advice over the phone, or if available to you, via secure video chat software.

These provisions have also just been authorized for psychiatrists for the provision of mental health-care services. These measures will enable New Brunswickers to maintain social distance and still get the care they need. More importantly, these measures will better enable our health-care professionals to focus on meeting the needs of the most urgent cases and minimize in-person contact in an environment where the risk of passing on infection may be high.

Testing has identified one additional presumptive case of COVID-19, bringing the number of presumptive or positive cases in New Brunswick to eight.

The case is a male, under 10 years of age in zone 3 (in the central part of the province). The patient is a close contact to a confirmed travel-related case.

Additional testing to confirm the cases as positive COVID-19 cases will take place at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

The provincial government has taken a number of steps to address the impact of COVID-19. As of today, only those public-sector workers who work in critical functions or areas that support critical functions will remain on the job.

Other changes include:

Nursing Homes

Premier Blaine Higgs reminded New Brunswickers visitation is restricted at nursing homes and hospitals in order to protect people over the age of 70 who are at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

Starting today, the Department of Social Development is introducing an urgent nursing home placement process to move 65 individuals currently in hospital beds receiving alternative levels of care into nursing homes around the province. These people will be moved into a nursing home that provides services in their language of choice within 100 kilometres of their permanent address. Doing this will enhance the well-being of seniors who require 24-hour nursing care while freeing up dozens of hospital beds. This will allow for more capacity in our health-care system to address the needs of people facing serious illness.

Legislature

Today, the legislative assembly sat with a quorum of 15 members. All the parties worked together to pass numerous pieces of legislation, including the legislation to postpone the municipal elections planned for May. This legislation will also make it possible to postpone the provincial byelections if that becomes necessary. A decision was also made today that the house is going to rise until further notice. This will help reduce interactions among members of the legislative assembly. The government is leading by example to highlight the importance of social distancing.

Businesses

Some businesses have had to temporarily close to help slow the spread of the virus, but Higgs reassured New Brunswickers that grocery stores and pharmacies have access to supplies and will stay open. Higgs congratulated the businesses that are not just staying open and that are making accommodations to make life easier for the most vulnerable residents by setting aside specific times for seniors and persons with disabilities to shop.

Higgs called on banks to consider what they can do to help small local businesses stay afloat, and he is working directly with the federal government to ensure there is a coordinated approach to assist small businesses and individuals who need help.

Correctional Services

In an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in correctional institutions, the province has closed public access to these facilities effective immediately. The restriction includes all members of the public, including inmate family members, volunteers and legal representatives.

These measures include all facilities in the province: Southeast Regional Correctional Centre; Saint John Regional Correctional Centre; Madawaska Regional Correctional Centre; Dalhousie Regional Correctional Centre; New Brunswick Youth Centre; and New Brunswick Women's Correctional Centre.

Inmates will be offered extra phone calls during this time. Correctional Services will be monitoring the need to continue with this restriction and will be taking advice from officials with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Child care

Information for essential service workers on how to access child care services is now available through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's [Parent Portal](#) or by calling 1-833-221-9339.

Facilities remaining open to support essential service workers will follow the advice set out by the chief medical officer, including reduced group sizes and social distancing. In addition, they will continue to follow strict health and safety directives.

The directive relating to individuals who have travelled internationally on or after March 9 continues to apply and such travellers are to avoid early learning and child care centres for a period of 14 days.