



THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS RELEASES A STATEMENT REGARDING COVID-19

For Immediate Release

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On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus, Covid-19, a global pandemic.

While it is necessary to continue our current efforts at containment to limit and delay the spread of the disease, it is equally important to acknowledge that this may well have only a limited effect. There is a very real potential threat to the health and safety of all Canadians.

Political leaders, understandably, have taken a very measured tone and the result has been a tentative, incremental and somewhat reactive approach to this emerging infection.

Panic is unwarranted and unhelpful.

However, if we are to succeed as a nation in meeting the challenge of the Covid 19 pandemic then we need to face the realities of the limitations of our hospital system.

After decades of neglect, Canadian hospitals are overcrowded and far exceed, on a daily basis, the safe occupancy rates of 85%, limiting our ability to respond to a rapid increase in emergency demand.

To be frank, there is no surge capacity in Canadian hospitals.

This has a clear and patently obvious effect on our emergency departments. Prolonged and concerning waits for care already threaten the safety of our patients and our staff and this will only get worse if this pandemic proves to be serious. Crowding in our ED's compromise our ability to maintain safe isolation practices.

While we can count on our emergency and hospital staff to do their best, we will need more support from our government to meet public need.

It is time for decisive action at the political level.

Social distancing is a necessary and decisive step to prevent our fragile health care system from being overwhelmed.

There must also be no more hesitation in demanding a more consistent approach to Covid-19 screening and the rapid deployment of a community based alternative approach to such screening to lessen the demand on an already overtaxed emergency health care system.

Similarly, the integrity of our emergency health system demands that our emergency staff be protected from the very disease they are trying to treat. We need to be reassured that there will be adequate supplies of personal protective equipment to meet the needs of this burgeoning threat.

Canada has an absolute shortage of trained and qualified emergency physicians and nurses. Their health and safety is of a vital national interest.

We call on government for a more robust societal response to this emerging threat.

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