

Dear colleagues,

LHSC has recently experienced a significant increase in the number of staff and physicians who have tested positive for COVID-19. As of Monday, LHSC had 14 staff/physicians who were off work having tested positive, with 55 under investigation and/or awaiting test results. In many of these cases, internal contact tracing has shown the spread to be caused by direct staff-to-staff transmission.

To be clear: this is unacceptable, considering the infection control safety protocols and procedures LHSC has put in place over the past eight months.

Over the summer we enjoyed several months of low community transmission equating to lower inpatient numbers. I understand that this likely led to a sense of perceived increased safety as we have continued to have issues where staff are taking off their masks to eat together, both indoors and out, without distancing themselves the appropriate 2m/6ft. But this week's numbers of staff and inpatient cases, coupled with a sharp and alarming increase in community transmission, must serve as our wake-up call. I'm know we are tired, but this pandemic is not over and LHSC has an obligation to ensure we can continue to provide safe and high-quality care to every patient who needs it.

I have said this many times over the course of the pandemic but given our current situation it bears repeating: as health-care workers we must set ourselves to a higher standard when it comes to living and modeling public health guidelines both inside and outside our workplace. Living our value of accountability means holding ourselves and each other accountable in adhering to the highest standards of personal, professional, and corporate responsibility. It means doing all we can to create a safe environment for everyone in our organization and accepting responsibility for the decisions, actions, and outcomes expected of every individual at LHSC. Willfully choosing to not adhere to our critical safety practices while at work may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

The only time you should be removing your mask is for a nutrition break, at which point you must maintain 2m/6ft of distance from others. With winter weather now upon us, we recognize there are fewer options for where to safely take your break and our Facilities Management team continues to work on strategies to make additional break spaces available. The designation of new break areas may require you to travel farther than you are used to in order to safely remove your mask. No different than those who must now travel farther to and from their vehicles as a result of perimeter screening, these measures are ultimately to ensure safety, for you, your colleagues, and our patients. I acknowledge this pandemic has resulted in many inconveniences in your work and professional lives. Please remember that safety is more important than convenience.

As case numbers continue to increase, we at LHSC know better than most that these are not just numbers. They are people whose illness can have ripple effects on those around them, including their family, friends, and colleagues. We need to ensure that our actions are not contributing to our community's increasing curve, and remain consistent and committed to following infection control safety protocols at all times—even when it's inconvenient. This is hard, I acknowledge that. Health care is not easy, particularly amidst a pandemic. But we must be exemplars for our community as many look to us and how we conduct ourselves personally and professionally. They follow our lead, and so I urge you to demonstrate accountability and ensure patients—and the health of our community—are at the centre of everything you do.

Dr. Paul Woods
President and CEO