

Date: March 19, 2020

To: All Staff

From: Maureen Devolin, Executive Director, Healthy Living
Dr. Huiming Yang, Provincial Medical Officer of Health, Healthy Living and Medical
Director, Screening Programs

RE: Delaying Cancer Screening Appointments during COVID-19 situation

To slow down the spread of COVID-19, and to ensure health resources are available to support the urgent needs of all Albertans, AHS' Screening Programs has made the decision, in collaboration with the Emergency Coordination Centre and our partners, to delay non-urgent cancer screening at this time.

This includes:

- Screening mammography at AHS Screen Test locations in Calgary and Edmonton, as well as the two mobile mammography units, is postponed until at least April 23, 2020.
- All non-urgent FIT positive screening related colonoscopy cases are postponed until further notice.

In addition, AHS Screening Programs is asking Albertans to delay routine cancer screening for breast cancer, cervical cancer and colorectal cancer. This includes:

- Screening mammography at AHS and community radiology sites.
- Pap testing in primary care settings.
- Fecal immunochemical testing (FIT), distributed by primary care and laboratory services.

AHS Screening Programs has prepared key messages which will be distributed via:

- Updates to [ScreeningforLife.ca](https://www.screeningforlife.ca) website
- Screening Programs' toll-free client services line that is available from 8am-4:30pm Monday to Friday
- AHS Screen Test staff contacting their clients to postpone scheduled appointments

Key messages:

- Asking Albertans to delay cancer screening is to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure that health resources are available to support the urgent needs of all Albertans.
- If Albertans have any NEW symptoms, such as a new breast lump, significant weight loss without trying, and bloody stools, they should please contact their health care provider.
- Any investigations already underway to follow up on any suspected cancer will continue, as will all surgeries or treatments scheduled to treat cancer.

We recognize some of your patients may be anxious with these postponements. However, the risks associated with delaying these diagnostic tests are low. This decision will support social distancing measures, and allows us to prioritize patients with the most urgent needs, preserve



and protect the frontline workforce, and create capacity in the healthcare system. For those who are particularly struggling with this, we advise them to contact the Alberta Mental Health Helpline toll free at 1-877-303-2642. This helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Other toll free supports can be found at [My Health Alberta emergency phone numbers](#).

We are asking Albertans to practice social distancing and/or isolation (if required) and postpone all non-urgent visits to their Primary Care Provider until further notice.

This decision was a difficult one to make. We recognize the dedication you show in providing these services to Albertans. Thank you for everything you are doing to support Alberta's COVID-19 response.