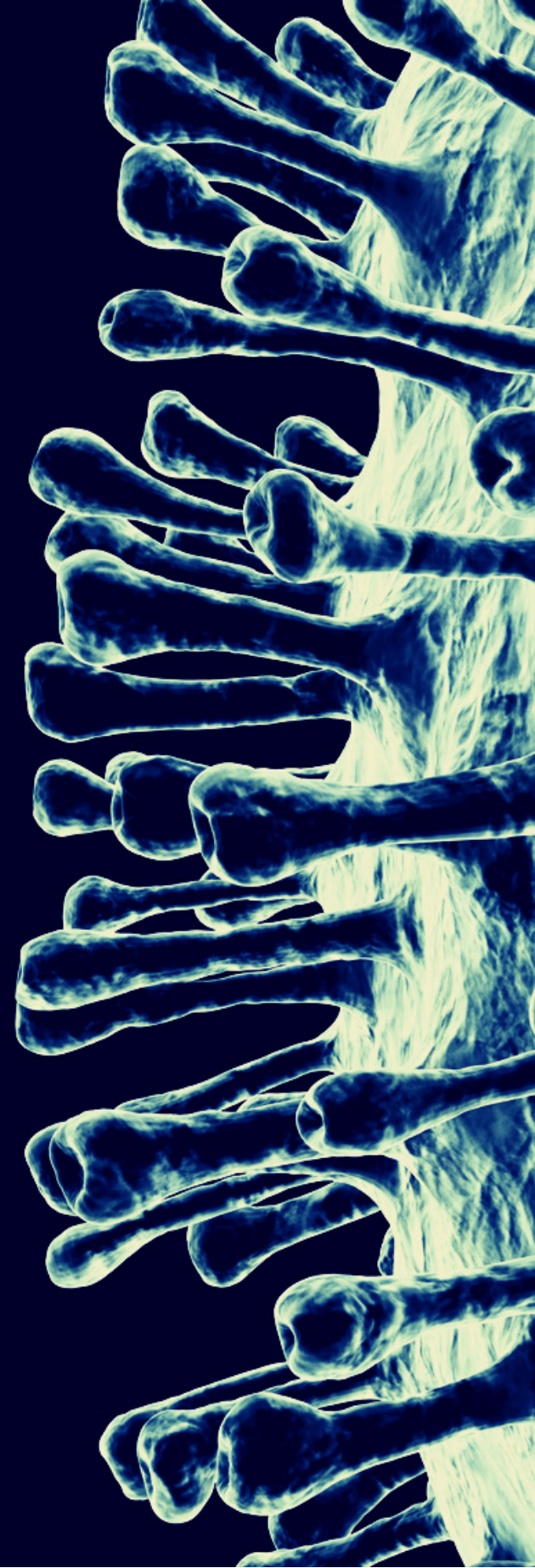


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COVID-19 AND CANADA'S CHILDREN:  
RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENSURE  
BEST HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR  
CHILDREN & YOUTH

March 23, 2020

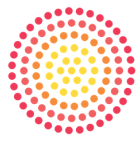


Endorsed by Canada's child health academic and research communities:



Pediatric Chairs of Canada  
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada





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## BACKGROUND

Children's Healthcare Canada is a national association representing all sixteen children's hospitals in Canada, as well as other health service delivery organizations that serve children and youth, including community hospitals, rehabilitation hospitals, children's treatment centres, regional health authorities, palliative care, respite, and home care agencies. In total, our membership includes nearly 250 individual healthcare delivery centres across Canada.

The following observations and recommendations were developed in light of the evolving Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and in consultation with our membership, across the continuum of care.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Children's Healthcare Canada recommends the following:

### **1 Implement emergency funding with budget flexibility to protect the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and their families:**

- **Expand capacity to test children and youth** suspected of contracting the COVID-19 virus.
- **Rapidly enable the expansion and equitable delivery of virtual care** to avoid delays in the provision of required healthcare services to meet physical and mental health needs of children, youth, and their families. This is especially important for those working in developmental pediatrics, child and youth mental health, and those caring for children with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism, to provide continuity of care.
- **Implement extraordinary measures to facilitate an expected surge in patient volumes, including children and youth.** Expand the capacity of and resources for home and community care to relieve pressures on hospitals and increase capacity in both emergency departments and intensive care units to better serve the acute and critical care needs of Canada's children, youth, and their families.
- **Provide direct financial support to caregivers/parents of children with complex medical needs, disabilities, or other vulnerabilities** to leverage respite care when necessary.



## 2 Urgently establish services to maintain the health of the healthcare workforce.

- **Take unprecedented measures to support the acquisition and distribution of personal protective equipment** throughout the healthcare system to protect our front line healthcare providers.
- **Establish an Emergency National Mental Health Support Service** for healthcare professionals and health leaders.
- **Front line healthcare providers require available and accessible child care** to remove barriers to service provision.

## 3 Support and fund Canadian health research to advance prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

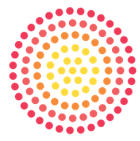
- **Leverage the capacity of Canada's three federal research agencies to facilitate** the development, testing and commercialization of a COVID-19 vaccine, and work to identify antiviral agents to reduce the transmission of the virus amongst children and youth.
- **Determine the short, medium, and long-term mental and physical impacts of COVID-19 and social distancing on children, youth, and their families**, including vulnerable groups including Indigenous children, and children with complex medical needs.

## 4 Ensure clear, consistent messaging delivered by trusted public health officials.

- In collaboration with provincial and territorial leaders, **define and deliver consistent messaging** with regards to evidence-informed public health measures including social distancing, and where and how children, youth, and their families can assess symptoms and, if appropriate, seek testing.

**Children are being significantly impacted both directly and indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic.** The diversity of healthcare organizations serving children, youth, and their families (for example, children's treatment centres, rehabilitation hospital, respite providers, home care) requires unique consideration with respect to policy and funding decisions.

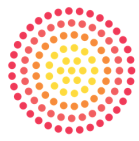
Children's Healthcare Canada welcomes federal government funding of \$500 million announced to date, to address critical healthcare system needs and to support mitigation efforts, including access to testing, equipment, and enhanced surveillance and monitoring. **More is urgently necessary.** As the federal government considers next steps, we urge you to consider both the immediate and emergent needs, as well as the longer-term challenges associated with chronic underfunding of social services - especially healthcare.



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## COVID-19 AND CANADA'S CHILDREN:

- All children are susceptible to COVID-19. Children's COVID-19 cases were originally considered less severe than those of adults, however, young children, particularly infants and children with medical complexity and other underlying health conditions, may be more vulnerable to infection and transmission.
- Research suggests for every confirmed COVID-19 case, there are between five and ten other cases undetected. Canada must increase the prioritization of, and capacity to, test and confirm results for children who are known vectors of the virus.
- While the science and research community is moving quickly, there is still no available vaccine for COVID-19. Accelerated federal investments in health research are necessary, and targeted investments in health research focused on COVID-19 and children is urgent. Of \$52M committed to date, only \$750K has been focused on the unique needs of children.
- Unlike SARS, COVID-19 has broader spread in the community. There is a need for enhanced infection and control practices both in healthcare facilities and in home care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Inpatient visitation has necessarily been limited across many sites. This carries the risk of negatively impacting the mental health of children and youth, as well as their caregivers.
- COVID-19 has and will continue to impact the mental health and wellness of children and youth in Canada. Particularly (but not exclusively) at risk are those with underlying and/or diagnosed mental health disorders.
- Most non-urgent care and elective procedures for children and youth have now been postponed. The capacity of the health system to address this backlog in a timely fashion following the pandemic will be critical to ensuring continuity of care and positive health outcomes.
- The mental and physical wellness of front-line health professionals and health administrators throughout the course of this pandemic is critical to ensure Canada's health system has capacity to serve its citizens during this extraordinary time of stress.
- Healthcare delivery organizations are incurring extraordinary expenditures to both establish surge capacity on site for anticipated COVID-19 patients, and to rapidly enable and roll out the delivery of virtual healthcare services. These organizations often rely on the funding support of their foundations who collectively expect to realize a \$100-150 million dollar loss in corporate sponsorship and philanthropic giving as the result of this pandemic.
- Communications from public officials about populations at risk, social distancing, self-isolation, and other public health approaches to "flatten the curve" - while initially consistent and concise - have become confusing and, at times, conflicting from the perspective of families.



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## CLOSING

Children's Healthcare Canada would like to acknowledge the federal government for taking a very proactive approach, introducing policy and financial levers to best position our country for this pandemic emergency. There is still work to be done, particularly to support a vulnerable population - the children and youth of Canada. Children's Healthcare Canada is well-positioned to assist you in that regard.

At any time, should you wish to connect with subject matter experts from this community to better understand the economic or health impacts of COVID-19, please do not hesitate to reach out to Children's Healthcare Canada directly.

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