



## **Renfrew County's Emergency Departments Remain Open And Safe For Urgent Care Needs**

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Since mid-March, Renfrew County's residents have done a tremendous job of "staying home" in an effort to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

However, Emergency Department physicians across Renfrew County are now concerned that the significantly reduced number of Emergency Department visits over the last couple of months, likely due to the fear of contracting or spreading COVID-19, could actually come at the cost of patients' health and safety.

"Already we are seeing an increased number of patients who delayed coming to the Emergency Department and are now arriving with more advanced symptoms and conditions which have led to poor outcomes or delays in disease management," said Dr. Tatiana Jilkina, Chief of Emergency at Pembroke Regional Hospital.

"Time is of the essence when treating many serious medical conditions so now is not the time to ignore symptoms or hesitate if you feel it's an emergency. A delay in seeking care could have a lasting impact on your outcome, with patients potentially suffering serious complications if they don't seek timely care," Dr. Jilkina said.

With COVID-19 dominating the news, it can be easy to forget that heart attacks, strokes and all kinds of other medical emergencies are still happening every day. And in the case of major strokes or heart attacks, for example, patients need to be treated within a few hours of developing symptoms in order to avoid permanent damage, disability or death.

"All hospitals in Renfrew County have taken every precaution to not only reduce the spread of COVID-19 but also to ensure the health and safety of our patients and staff. If patients are experiencing symptoms that, pre-COVID, would have brought them to the Emergency Department, then the Emergency Department or a call to 9-1-1 should still be their number one choice," Dr. Jilkina said.

For those unsure of whether or not their condition requires a trip to the Emergency Department, you can always call your family doctor or primary care provider to talk about it first, said Dr. Alex Atfield, Chief of the Emergency Department at St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay.

"Staying home and waiting can make some health conditions much worse," said Dr. Atfield. "At SFMH we have made major changes to keep you as safe as possible from acquiring COVID-19 while you are here getting the care you need. Don't take a risk by staying home if you are worried that you might have a serious illness. We're open and ready to see you," he said.

In all of the region's hospitals, patients are screened upon entry and those presenting with COVID-19 symptoms are rapidly segregated and provided with appropriate protective equipment such as masks. As a result, the risk of contracting COVID-19 through an emergency department visit is minimal.

"The pandemic has focused our efforts toward avoiding *unnecessary* close contact - especially in the form of crowds in an emergency department waiting room - but people should be reassured that our Emergency Department continues to provide a safe setting in which to receive care," said Dr. Terence Woods, Chief of the Emergency Department at Arnprior Regional Health. "This is even more so the case now that, months into the pandemic, we have had time to prepare comprehensive, site-specific infection control measures. These have become what is probably the 'new normal'," Dr. Woods said.

All hospitals are thankful for the work that's being done by the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (RCVTAC) to connect residents with primary care during these difficult times and manage non-urgent health concerns and conditions.

"The Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre provides much-needed, 24/7 access to health care for residents who have non-life-threatening health issues and do not have a family physician or cannot reach their family physician," said Dr. Jonathan Fitzsimon, Clinical Coordinator, RC VTAC. "Patients can be assessed virtually or with a home visit. Most concerns can be dealt with by the VTAC physicians and community paramedics without a need to go to the Emergency Department."

This service is available by calling 1-844-727-6404.

"Since its launch in March, the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre has done a wonderful job of diverting patients whose healthcare needs can be met outside of the Emergency Department, said Dr. Kathryn Kipp, Chief of Staff at the Deep River and District Hospital.

"Previously, patients would have come to the Emergency Department because they didn't have VTAC as an alternative option to seek care. Patients should continue to contact their primary care providers or come to the Emergency Department if they have a serious health concern, but VTAC offers a great solution to deal with those concerns that can be addressed outside of the hospital."

Dr. Kristian Davis, Medical Director at Renfrew Victoria Hospital's Emergency Department added that VTAC has played a vital role in maintaining and providing non-COVID medical services in our community during this COVID pandemic.

"By reducing the need for face-to-face contact with patients, VTAC minimized the potential of COVID-19 transmission from asymptomatic individuals who, in the past, had to physically visit healthcare facilities. Hopefully VTAC will become part of the 'new normal' of our healthcare system in an ongoing COVID world," Dr. Davis said.

And while Renfrew County's Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Rob Cushman praised residents of the region, particularly senior citizens with chronic conditions, for helping curb spread of the virus by staying home and maintaining good health, he said that if someone is in need of care, the time has come to seek it out.

“The hospitals and the emergency rooms are safe. There are currently no positive COVID-19 cases in our hospitals, and all the right precautions are now in place in the event that there is a case,” Dr. Cushman said.

### **What’s an emergency?**

Anyone who is experiencing symptoms of a stroke, heart attack or another medical emergency should call 911 right away. These include:

- Accidents.
- Coughing up or vomiting blood.
- Head injury or any other major injury.
- Heart attack symptoms (tightness in the chest and arm, shortness of breath, nausea, lightheadedness).
- Loss of consciousness.
- Poisoning or drug overdose.
- Severe burns.
- Severe COVID-19 symptoms, including shortness of breath.
- Sudden and severe headache.
- Severe, persistent abdominal pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Stroke symptoms (facial droop, arm weakness, speech difficulties).
- Suicidal feelings.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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