

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN PRIMARY CARE?

On March 23, the Provincial Health Officer directed that “All non-essential and elective services involving direct physical contact with patients should be reduced to minimal levels, subject to allowable exceptions, until further notice.” Physicians are in the best position to determine what is essential in their specific health practice and with their patients.

We have excerpted the following examples of primary care needs that can or cannot be deferred from [BC's Pandemic Influenza Response Plan \(2012\)](#). We recommend reading the document for full information.

	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
PRIORITY A	<p>Patients who have urgent needs and require services / treatment and would otherwise have to go to hospital for care.</p> <p>Essential preventive services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute exacerbation of chronic illness that doesn't require hospitalization • Complications of pregnancy • Certain acute infections, such as otitis, UTI, cellulitis, STIs, acute diarrhea with blood • Acute major illness/injury (including fractures or potential fractures or dislocations) • Acute minor injuries (e.g. lacerations that require more than taping) • Acute psychiatric illness • Abdominal pain NYD • Musculoskeletal pain with trigger features (i.e. not a basic sprained ankle) • New onset headache • Palliative care • Patients recently discharged from hospital on new medications who must be followed closely (e.g. Warfarin) • Patients requiring pneumococcal immunization • Flu vaccine when it becomes available • Other vaccines/prophylaxis required for outbreak control • Routine childhood immunization
PRIORITY B	<p>Patients whose situation is non-critical and who require treatment / services that can be deferred for a few weeks (i.e. after the peak of the pandemic wave).</p> <p>Alternate method for prescription renewal for long-term medications is appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable chronic disease management, including asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and stable cardiac, pulmonary, renal, neurological or hepatic disease • Uncomplicated pregnancy care – 1st or 2nd trimester • Well baby visit
PRIORITY C	<p>Patients whose condition is non-life threatening and who require services that can either be deferred or managed in another way (e.g. automatic prescriptions) for the duration of the pandemic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well child and adult checkups • Nutrition and weight counselling • Pap smears • Routine adult immunizations • Preventive services and clinics • Insurance and other forms

Adapted from Table 11-3 of the Ontario Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (August 2008)