

September 1, 2020

Dear Patient:

Please note that I will be away from the office on sabbatical from September 1, 2020 to October 31, 2020 inclusive. Dr. Ted Maloney will be covering my practice during this time. You can book telephone appointments as usual through my reception.

If you are a patient in a research study please contact Roberta Halpenny for study visit options.

As you know, the province continues in a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is the term used to describe the respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Measures remain in place in order to slow the spread of this virus in Canada. Fortunately most cases of infection are now mild or moderate in severity and require no treatment at all, just rest and staying at home.

In order to do our part to continue to slow the spread of the virus and follow the directives of the Ontario Ministry of Health, the following recommendations and changes to clinic operations continue:

1. Do not come to the clinic unless you have received instruction to do so. The doors are locked and closed and all staff are working from home. The office staff is available Monday through Thursday 10am-1pm and 2-4pm if you need to pick up forms, test kits, etc. -- please knock on the door and someone will be with you shortly.

2. For the foreseeable future, **all appointments will be booked as telephone assessments (and we do not have a date when regular in-person visits might resume)**. If you have a telephone appointment booked, you might receive a phone call from a blocked or unknown number so please answer the phone or be sure your phone can accept these types of calls. If you do not answer, a new appointment will have to be scheduled.

If a physical (in-person) examination is required you will be provided specific instructions from your physician on how and when that will occur. Please note “annual physical examinations” are not deemed essential and these are not being booked at this time.

To book a telephone appointment, email reception or call to arrange a time.

3. If you have any respiratory-related symptoms (i.e. cough, fever) or other secondary symptoms and you are concerned about COVID-19 you can use this **self-assessment tool**:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>

4. If you have any respiratory-related symptoms (i.e. cough, fever) or other secondary symptoms, complete the self-assessment tool, and follow its advice which may mean **staying at home for 14 days**. Self-isolation instructions are available online.

5. If you are HIV-positive and are on anti-retrovirals then there is no evidence to suggest you are at higher risk for acquiring COVID-19 nor are you at greater risk for having more severe disease if you do. This website has excellent answers to most questions:

<https://www.iasociety.org/covid-19-hiv>

6. If you are HIV-positive or on PrEP and you are due or overdue to complete blood work, please contact the office to obtain requisitions that you can print, or they also be faxed directly to Lifelabs. For prescription refills, please have your pharmacy fax a request for medication renewals as per the usual protocol. If you have stopped your PrEP because you have been physically distancing please arrange for a telephone appointment for instructions on how to resume your medication properly.

7. COVID-19 tests can only be done at **designated assessment centres in Toronto**. To find one near you can use this website:

<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-health-advice/covid-19-assessment-centres/>

Please read through the instructions on the website as assessment centres may have a slightly different protocols to be seen. Patients report the best service at the centres located at St. Michael's Hospital and Michael Garron (formerly Toronto East General) Hospital. A blood test for antibodies has been approved but is currently only available in certain clinical circumstances.

8. If you have **severe respiratory symptoms** like shortness of breath or fever that is not responding to Tylenol then you should go to an emergency department. Mask yourself when leaving your home. Advise the hospital staff that you have severe respiratory symptoms.

9. **Prevention is critical** – practice both physical distancing (instructions follow) and washing your hands properly. Currently, community virus spread is common. This coronavirus is mainly spread by respiratory droplets, and this can occur 1-3 days before you might have any symptoms. **A mask will help protect you and protect others.** Even if you feel fine you still might be contagious. A variety of masks have become widely available. Wear a mask accordingly to local by-laws, this is usually when you cannot ensure physical distancing or are in-doors. Currently masking is the best known measure of protection.

10. **Mental health** maintenance is important during these times when we all have been asked to stay at home. Our clinic website has information about online resources to help look after your mental health.

And thank you all for your kind feedback during this pandemic.

Regards,

Drs. Jason Brunetta