



JUN 11 2020

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MLA, MONFWI

Oral Question 263-19(2): Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic in Long-Term Care Centres

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on June 1, 2020 regarding Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic in Long-Term Care Centres.

Current guidance from public health authorities, including the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World Health Organization, emphasizes that COVID-19 transmission is primarily through droplets, which typically fall onto a surface within 1 meter after a person coughs, sneezes, talks or breathes. Accordingly, the recommended infection control measures are focused on direct person-to-person contact and surface transfer of droplets. Airborne transmission is not presently understood to be a primary path of transmission of COVID-19, except during some specific aerosol-generating medical procedures, which typically are not conducted in long-term care facilities and for which specific controls are defined.

Ventilation systems are not a primary path of COVID-19 transmission. Current understanding is that the infectious droplets are not travelling through the air ducts. Neutralizing them at a central heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system would not interrupt the primary mode of person-to-person transfer within a room.

This is an emerging field of research. GNWT health professionals and technical staff are monitoring this topic, including published guidance from public health authorities, industry associations, and the technical committee for Canadian Standards Association. The recommended measures at this time do not include the installation of “virus scrubbers” in building HVAC systems.

GNWT staff are aware of anecdotal media reporting of COVID-19 transmission by ventilations systems, including the April 26, 2020 National Post article about an infection outbreak at a restaurant in Guangzhou, China. The Government of Canada has assessed that the “HVAC system” in this case was actually a small, wall-mounted air conditioning unit blowing high-velocity air that carried droplets between adjacent tables – not a central ventilation system like is typical of GNWT buildings and health care facilities. GNWT staff will also follow the results of the University of Alberta mechanical engineering research project on this topic.

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As mentioned in the House, the Department has put in place other infection prevention and control measures in long-term care facilities in response to COVID-19. These include limiting visitors, limiting group recreational activities, screening staff for illness before and during shifts, wearing masks continuously when in client care areas, cleaning common touch areas frequently, and conducting temperature checks for residents every shift.

Thank you.



Diane Thom
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator
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