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March 13, 2020

Attention: All Members
Ambulance Paramedics & Emergency Dispatchers of BC

Re: COVID-19 Update

As you may be aware, on February 27th, the APBC sent a letter to the senior management of BCEHS seeking clarification and direction on multiple health and operational issues and questions surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak. To date, we have not received any response from BCEHS. I want to let everyone know what the union is doing to provide as much information as possible to maintain your health and wellbeing during this extraordinary health emergency in Canada.

Potential or confirmed exposure to a COVID-19 patient:

Today, on the weekly conference calls with the Ministry of Health and Public Health (Dr. Henry), the following process has been confirmed by the office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO):

- 1) If you have had exposure to a COVID-19 patient and were NOT wearing the BCEHS approved PPE, you should minimize exposure with other people, contact your manager for direction and seek Public Health direction on the need to self-isolate.
- 2) If you have had exposure to a COVID-19 patient and you WERE wearing the appropriate PPE (i.e., completing an ambulance call), then you should advise your manager in writing (email for your personal racking records) and self-monitor for any COVID symptoms which include: fever, cough and associated ILI symptoms.

Members have been reporting exposures to the workplace health call centre and have been told to NOT contact them. We have confirmed that this is because all notification is coming from a single point of coordination within public health. The union is recommending that all exposures are still reported to BCEHS through their unit chiefs or managers via email for personal record keeping.

We are engaged in a twice weekly conference call to address the health and safety issues that arise out of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Pay and Leaves:

Yesterday, on the weekly teleconference with the Health Employer's Association of BC (HEABC), which is the bargaining agent for BCEHS, we were updated on the plan for pay and leaves. If you are a Full-time or Regular Part-time employee and have either been directed to self-isolate by a qualified medical practitioner or you have tested positive for COVID-19 you will be placed on **a general leave with pay**. If you are an on-call employee and have the same situation as above, you will be placed on a **general leave with pay based on an average of the preceding three (3) months or earnings**. In both cases, the employer is being asked not to seek a medical certificate (Dr's note) as these employees will need to be cleared to return to work by a medical professional with accompanying documentation.

Your executive will continue to participate in all the weekly union/HEABC teleconferences to address any labour relations issues.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

We have been made aware of members attempting to order PPE from the product distribution centre and being advised that PPE items are on “back order”. The employer has confirmed that they have placed restrictions on ordering PPE in order to avoid “hoarding”. Unfortunately, they did not communicate that to staff. Members who are responsible for ordering stock should contact their manager and seek CLEAR and unambiguous direction on the process to order appropriate PPE.

Travel Restrictions:

With the BC government announcement yesterday, we have asked the HEABC to clarify what the process is for both members that are returning to BC from vacation, who live in other provinces or countries and for our Air crews who transport to other countries and provinces in the normal course of their duties. We will share this information as soon as we get an answer from the HEABC. PHSa has put out a request to limit all personal travel outside of Canada as of today to all PHSa employees, which includes us.

Operational Issues:

On the conference call today, we asked what steps are being taken to revise dispatch policies to limit exposure to other allied health and public safety partners. In addition, we also asked if the regulator (EMALB) has been contacted to waive CME requirements, expectations around transport to the hospital and the utilization of paramedics to mitigate transport. For example, in other paramedic services in Canada, Community Paramedics are performing COVID-19 testing for the public health authority to keep sick patients away from the hospitals. We will update you as soon as we receive an answer.

Personal Safety:

A separate communication will go out regarding the right to refuse unsafe work and the specific process to follow. We have asked BCEHS what paramedics and dispatchers are supposed to do if they cohabitate with at risk populations such as the immunocompromised or elderly. We have also asked the PHO for direction on employees who are, or are trying to become pregnant. Again, we are awaiting the response and will communicate them as soon as we receive them.

Psychological Health and Wellness:

This is a stressful time for members who already perform one of the most stressful occupations in the world. It is important to communicate timely, accurate information and not to propagate unconfirmed or untruthful statements. WE have asked BCEHS to make any potential or confirmed exposure a “sentinel event” for the CISM team to at least provide contact for those members. It is important to take care of yourself and other members who are the pointy end of the healthcare system during this crisis.

Communication:

Yesterday, myself and Provincial Vice President Dave Deines met with the Minister of Health and his Deputy. We raised our concerns with the lack of timely information being sent to Paramedics & Dispatchers. We are hopeful that this situation will improve

I want to thank you all for your continued dedication and professionalism and want you all to know that we are proud of each of you for facing this adversity in such brave manner. It is unfortunate that the employer



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has chosen to not communicate frequently with the staff, but if you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Regional Vice President and we will do whatever we can to get an answer.

We will provide an update each week to let you know what we have learned through the various meetings.

Stay safe, stay diligent and look after each other.

Sincerely,



Troy Clifford
Provincial President
Ambulance Paramedics & Emergency Dispatchers of BC
CUPE Local 873

Cc: Provincial Executive Board, Local 873
APBC Media releases

TC/sd/MoveUp

