

College of
Dietitians
of Ontario



PANDEMIC GUIDE

FOR

REGISTERED DIETITIANS IN ONTARIO

MARCH 2020

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I. INTRODUCTION

A pandemic is a worldwide spread of a disease which results in several simultaneous epidemics and a vast number of illnesses.

This *Pandemic Guide for Registered Dietitians in Ontario* (Guide) articulates College of Dietitians of Ontario (the College) policies about what is expected from dietitians during a pandemic. It also provides a framework and resources to support dietitians in planning for and dealing with a pandemic situation in both their professional practice and their personal life.

The [World Health Organization](#) on Wednesday March 11, 2020 declared the novel coronavirus (2019-nCov) outbreak a pandemic. The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) have launched a [website](#) to guide health care professionals on the novel coronavirus.

It is important to recognize that as regulated health professionals, dietitians and the College have a role to play in managing the pandemic health threat that will affect both work and family life. During an infectious disease outbreak, such as the novel coronavirus pandemic, demands for client care may result in dietitians having to weigh the provision of such care against competing obligations to their own health and that of their family members. The policies and information in this Guide will assist dietitians in exercising their professional judgment through the course of responding to a pandemic.

In the current context of pandemic planning, there is a need for discussion and dialogue to protect the values of openness and transparency, as well as a need to be inclusive of employer and stakeholder views. It is expected that RDs will examine their current roles in the health care system and the possible impact a pandemic may have on their delivery of services.

II. HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This *Guide* is a comprehensive resource about the professional and personal responsibilities of Registered Dietitians in Ontario. It includes information on preparing for a pandemic, how to stay informed, the role of organizations (including the responsibilities of the College) and concludes with an extensive list of resources. It also outlines the expectations, obligations, and concepts that a dietitian should consider when developing a professional practice pandemic plan or preparing a personal plan in the event of and during a pandemic.

Of critical importance are the following sections:

- III. College Expectations of Registered Dietitians
- IV. General & Ethical Obligations
- V. How Do Registered Dietitians Prepare for and respond during a Pandemic
- VI. How Registered Dietitians Can Help
- VII. Staying Up to Date

This *Guide* is intended to be used electronically as it contains several hyperlinks to internal and external resources. If you notice any outdated links or have any questions/require further clarification on any of the information mentioned in this *Guide*, please do not hesitate to contact the College's Practice Advisory Service:

Practice Advisors

practiceadvisor@collegeofdietitians.org

416-598-1725 ext. 397 or toll free: 1-800-668-4990

For the latest updates on COVID-19 in Ontario

[Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#)

Health workers and health sector employers can call the **Healthcare Provider Hotline** for more information: Toll free: 1-866-212-2272

III. COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS OF REGISTERED DIETITIANS

This section articulates the College guidelines about what dietitians are expected to do during a pandemic or an outbreak of a serious infectious illness such as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A. Provide Ethical, Competent and Safe Professional Services

1. **Acquire the competence to carry out work tasks that are outside of your normal scope of practice.** During a pandemic, dietitians may be asked to perform tasks outside of their usual dietetic scope of practice. In accepting these tasks, dietitians need to assess their competence and take appropriate steps to acquire competence in an area, such as screening for symptoms. In addition, dietitians need to consider general and ethical obligations as outlined in this resource.
2. **Fulfill your professional commitment to your clients and the profession.** During a pandemic outbreak, the [Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991](#) and the [Dietetics Act, 1991](#) and other laws affecting professional practice will continue to be in place.
3. **Base practice and personal decisions on expert, evidence-based information as issued by public health and government officials.**
4. **Follow directives from your Employer, and the Public Health and Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care officials.**

B. Be Informed & Prepared

Registered Dietitians are expected to be prepared to prevent the spread of illness and to assist their clients. This *Guide* is the first step towards becoming more informed about the COVID-19 pandemic and the resources which provide accurate and current information.

1. Have a Plan

Plan both professionally and personally using these helpful resources:

- Consult your employer's pandemic plan and become familiar with your facility protocols.
- MOHLTC [Emergency Planning and Preparedness for COVID -19](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Being Prepared](#).
- Public Health Ontario [Hand Washing Information](#)

2. Stay Informed

- For the latest updates on COVID-19 in Ontario, see links from the [Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#)

- The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care have provided [guidance for the health sector](#) (i.e. Acute Care, Primary Care, Home & Community Care and Long-Term Care Settings).
- Health workers and health sector employees can also call the Ministry Healthcare Provider Hotline for more information 1-866-212-2272 (toll-free).
- Pay attention to your employer communications;
- Consult the College website for communication updates.

3. Inform Your Clients

- Refer to the [Public Health Ontario COVID-19 Public Resources](#) for reliable information to help you inform your clients.
- Clients should contact **Telehealth Ontario** at 1-866-797-0000 or their local public health unit if they are experiencing symptoms of the 2019 novel coronavirus.

IV. GENERAL & ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS

General Obligations

During a pandemic outbreak, the [Regulated Health Professions Act](#) and the [Dietetics Act](#) and other laws affecting health care delivery will continue to be in place. The College expects dietitians to fulfill their commitment to their clients and the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing quality nutrition care that is within their individual competence.

Ethical Obligations

Registered Dietitians will be expected to make decisions based on their employer protocols, public health and governmental guidelines, the [Code of Ethics for Dietitians in Ontario](#) and their own personal ethical framework to ensure they are practicing competently, ethically and safely during a pandemic.

It is recognized that the answers to ethical dilemmas relating to client care are often situational, and that the knowledge, skills and judgment of the individual will vary between professions and practice settings. As well, in an emergency, there may be a need for health care professionals to be reallocated from their usual roles and settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, dietitians may be asked to perform tasks outside of the dietetic scope of practice. While personal competence may restrict certain practices, dietitians need to consider how they can gain competence in an area to support their workplace, their clients, and other stakeholders in a time of need. Above all, dietitians need to follow directives from their employer, public health and the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care during a pandemic.

During a pandemic, governments and public health authorities will have to make difficult decisions (e.g., access to medications, reallocation of people and resources, etc.). Members of the public, health care workers and organizations are more likely to accept the difficult decisions that must be made if the decision-making processes are open and transparent, reasonable, inclusive, responsive, and accountable. Refer to updates from the [Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care and Public Health Ontario](#).

V. HOW REGISTERED DIETITIANS SHOULD PREPARE FOR A PANDEMIC

Registered Dietitians should take the time to educate themselves about pandemics by knowing the facts to prepare professionally and personally for responding when there is a pandemic. Developing good infection control practices in your day-to-day activities is your first-line of defense to help to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Proper hand washing as well as practicing coughing and sneezing etiquette that encourages sneezing into your sleeve are current evidence-based best practices, shown to be the most effective ways to reduce the spread of infections.

You can take proactive steps now to help prepare yourself and your family for a pandemic. Here are some links to informative resources:

Infection Prevention Resources

- [Infection prevention and control for novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Interim guidance for acute healthcare settings](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): For health professionals](#)
- [Novel Coronavirus infection: Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)
- In addition the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a hand washing resource titled: [Your 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene](#).

Resources for Public and Health Care Professionals

The MOHLTC posts important [health updates](#) including current COVID-19 pandemic information on their website for both the public and health professionals. This helpful resource will help dietitians keep current with the government direction, planning activities and new developments.

VI. HOW REGISTERED DIETITIANS CAN HELP

During an infectious disease outbreak, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demands for care may result in health care providers having to weigh the provision of such care against competing obligations to their own health and that of their family members. Registered Dietitians should consider their personal competencies relevant to the provision of care during this pandemic and develop a plan for decision-making and involvement. In some cases, dietitians may be asked to provide care in an area of dietetic practice that they do not commonly work in or assist in an area that may be outside of the dietetic scope of practice.

Individual circumstances will vary depending on practice settings and the nature of professional practice. There are no right or wrong answers. Consider your personal competence (knowledge and skill) and self-assess how to best be of assistance.

A. Self-Assessment Tools

The College has also published a [RD Role & Task Decision Framework](#) to assist RDs to consider requests and opportunities for assuming new tasks and roles, including taking on new responsibilities during a pandemic.

B. Local Information Resources

Contact your local [Public Health Unit](#) to review the guidelines developed for managing emergencies in your municipality and find out how you may be of assistance in your community during the pandemic.

VII. STAYING UP TO DATE

A. MOH Pandemic Information

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most up-to date information will be available directly from the [Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care](#).

- The Ministry of Health – Health System Emergency Management Branch will also maintain a Healthcare Provider Hotline: 1-866-212-2272 and email: emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca
- Free advice and information will also be available via Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000.

Contact **Telehealth Ontario** at [1-866-797-0000](tel:1-866-797-0000) or your [local public health unit](#) if you're experiencing symptoms of the 2019 coronavirus.

Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

B. COLLEGE Updates

COLLEGE will disseminate relevant information to dietitians and other stakeholders in a timely manner via email broadcasts, website postings and/or telephone recordings.

- Website: <https://www.collegeofdietitians.org/home.aspx>
- Phone: 416-598-1725 or toll free at 1-800-668-4990.

VIII. ROLES OF ORGANIZATIONS

A. The Role of the College

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the College expects to operate with few disruptions, none of which will affect the College's public protection mandate. A decision to move operations to a virtual format has been made to both protect our team and reduce potential College disruptions. Staff will be available to provide support via telephone, email, teleconference, webinar, and through the College website, in order to continue the operation of essential regulatory tasks and critical functions.

During a pandemic, to the extent possible the College will:

1. Ensure effective communication with members;
2. Continue to provide professional practice advice on regulatory issues and standards of practice;
3. Maintain a mechanism to register qualified applicants; and
4. Conduct other critical business functions as required to address regulatory issues.

In order to achieve these goals during a pandemic, the College will:

- Maintain the Practice Advisory Program;
- Maintain the Registration Program;
- Maintain communications with members and other stakeholders; and
- Maintain the Quality Assurance Program and professional conduct activities and reexamine what is continued as required during the pandemic.

The College will be unavailable for:

- Unscheduled visits
- Courier packages cannot be received at the College office. Please use mail and registered mail which will be received at an alternative location.

B. The Requirements for Health Care Providers (Regulated Health Professionals or Persons who operate a Group Practice of Regulated Health Professionals)

As per the Ministry of Health, [COVID-19 Directive #2 Issued March 19, 2020](#) under Section 77.7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7 the following steps are required immediately:

1. All non-essential and elective services should be ceased or reduced to minimal levels, subject to allowable exceptions, until further notice. Allowable exceptions can be made for time sensitive circumstances to avert or avoid negative patient outcomes or to avert or avoid a situation that would have a direct impact on the safety of patients.
2. Clinicians are in the best position to determine what is essential in their specific health practice. In making decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services, regulated health professionals should be guided by their regulatory College, and the following principles:
 1. Proportionality. Decision to eliminate non-essential services should be proportionate to the real or anticipated limitations in capacity to provide those services.
 2. Minimizing Harm to Patients. Decisions should attempt to limit harm to patients wherever possible. This requires considering the differential benefits and burdens to patients and patient populations as well as available alternatives to relieve pain and suffering.
 3. Equity. Equity requires that all persons in the same category (i.e. at different levels of urgency) be treated in the same way unless relevant differences exist. This requires considering time on wait lists and experience with prior cancellations.
 4. Reciprocity. Certain patients and patient populations will be particularly burdened as a result of cancelling non-essential services. Patients should have the ability to have their health monitored, receive appropriate care, and be reevaluated for emergent activities should it be required.

Decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services

Decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services should be made using processes that are fair to all patients. As this outbreak evolves, there will be continual review of emerging evidence to understand the most appropriate measures to take to protect health care providers and patients. This will continue to be done in collaboration with health system partners and technical experts from Public Health Ontario and with the health system.

In addition, dietitians may find [The Framework for identifying and managing risk in dietetics](#) helpful when prioritizing essential versus non-essential services.

C. Expansion of Virtual Home Care Delivery During COVID-19

Virtual care includes but is not limited to care delivered over the phone or through video conferencing. Virtual care delivery includes the meaningful communication of a patient's health status and/or the treatment/intervention needed to support their care needs.

Virtual care includes:

- Phone calls
- Video conferencing
- Secure messaging
- Remote monitoring

The Ministry recently amended O. Reg. 386/99 under the *Home Care and Community Services Act (HCCSA), 1994* to clarify that professional services, including dietetics may be provided virtually.

These recommendations apply to all professional services, including nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dietetics, and social work.

For guidance on expansion of virtual health delivery during COVID – 19, please see [COVID-19 Directive #2 Issued March 19, 2020](#)

Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) have been directed by the Ministry to scale up existing, proven virtual care models where they exist, and consider other models as appropriate.

Professional services defined under HCCSA are eligible for immediate deployment of virtually delivered care as per the Ministry.

Eligible virtual delivery includes:

- Wellness and health checks, including monitoring of conditions/symptoms
- Remote clinical consultation or intervention related to client care plan goals
- Support for assessment and reassessment of treatment plan
- Videoconferencing for visual assessments
- Caregiver education/training to support patient care and/or self-isolation efforts
- Patient education/training related to care
- Complement essential hands-on care
- Replacing in-person care when a physical visit is not possible, or necessary
- Any other service aligned with the goals of this guidance and approved by the LHIN or approved agency

Virtual delivery does not include practices that are normally conducted virtually as part of regular home care, such as scheduling and case management or issues management calls with patients and caregivers.

When implementing virtual care in home and community care dietitians should consider use of technology, privacy, and consent:

- **Technology:** Dietitians should work with their employers who may leverage existing virtual care technologies, including the secure videoconferencing tools provided through the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) to support virtually delivered care. Patients and caregivers will work with their care providers to determine whether they may leverage patient-owned devices to support virtual care. LHINs, approved agencies and provider partners may review the Digital Health Playbook for guidance on the use of technologies to support virtual care and further guidance on technology standards for virtual visit solutions will be available on OTN's website.
- **Privacy and consent:** Like all home and community care services, virtual delivery must continue to comply with consent and privacy requirements outlined in the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA)* and the *Health Care Consent Act, 1996*. In situations where providers are working from home or other non-standard locations, they must ensure that virtual communication is done in a private setting (unless in emergency situations).
- Additionally, dietitians may refer to the [Telephone and Web-Based Counselling](#) for guidance, or contact the Practice Advisors.

IX. KEY PANDEMIC RESOURCES

The information pertaining to pandemic planning is extensive. The College has compiled a resource list to assist members — both personally and professionally.

[Ontario Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care \(MOHLTC\)](#)

Responsible for planning and managing the response to a pandemic in Ontario including communicating information provincially to health care workers in partnership with various organizations such as professional groups, regulatory health colleges (i.e., the College Dietitians of Ontario) and labour groups.

[Public Health Ontario](#)

Public Health Ontario provides expert advice on infectious diseases for Ontario and advises the Chief Medical Officer of Health on prevention, surveillance and control measures necessary to protect the people of Ontario from infectious diseases.

[Local Public Health Units](#)

Provides community and public health information.

[Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#)

Communicates with key international organizations about pandemic outbreak activity worldwide. Responsible for coordinating a nationwide pandemic response.

X. SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic will inevitably impact the lives of all Registered Dietitians, their families, and their clients. It is essential for dietitians to take the time to be familiar with the College pandemic policies, to be informed and to take proactive steps to develop a plan (both professionally and personally) and ensure that plans are in place during a pandemic.

The College will update dietitians in pandemic planning and will strive to keep members informed during the pandemic. Communication will be accomplished through resource links and postings on the College's website, as well as email broadcasts to members and stakeholders, as warranted.

Dietitians may also contact the College's Practice Advisory Service for guidance. We know that everyone is concerned about this pandemic. We also know that as dedicated professionals, you will do all you can to ease the burden for your clients, colleagues, and staff. Stay safe, wash your hands, and take care of yourself, your families, friends, and neighbor.

XI. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS¹

With the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage dietitians to access the [Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care](#) and [Public Health Ontario \(PHO\)](#) websites for up-to-date information.

For Practice Advisory FAQs, please see the College's [Pandemic FAQs page](#).

¹ Some of these frequently asked questions have been adapted from the College of Nurses of Ontario (2020). Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Retrieved from <https://www.cno.org/en/trending-topics/novel-coronavirus/>