
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**MEDIA RELEASE****MARCH 30, 2020**

Health minister misinformed: 87 per cent of Ontario health care staff polled say not enough PPE on hand to keep them safe

TORONTO, ON – On Saturday, after Ontario Minister of Health Christine Elliot announced that personal protective equipment (PPE) it was readily available, 87 per cent of health care staff polled by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) reported that they do not have access to the PPE they need to deal with COVID-19 patients.

Of the 3000-health staff who responded to questions, 91 per cent said they feel abandoned by the provincial government. 88 per cent report that the failure to maintain a stockpile of protective equipment and decision to destroy 54 million expired N95 masks without replacing the supply, made them feel their health and safety doesn't matter to the government.

"Our hospital members report that supplies are being rationed. In long-term care and home care these protections are especially scarce. There is a sense of abandonment and a building anger that the Ontario government has downgraded its safety protocols. We are asking for those protocols to be toughened; for expired masks to be distributed and for industry to be immediately directed to produce masks and testing kits," says Michael Hurley president of CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU/CUPE).

Hurley stressed that in China only 3 per cent of cases are health care staff. China health facilities use airborne precautions and Ontario is currently using droplet transmission PPE. Reports from New York City - where droplet precautions and protective equipment protocols similar to Ontario's are in place - indicate that 20 per cent of paramedics are now off with COVID-19.

A new University of Nebraska study found that COVID-19, spread through both direct (droplet and person-to-person) as well as indirect contact (contaminated objects and 20 airborne transmission). This, according to the Nebraska study supports the use of airborne isolation precautions.

"We are told repeatedly by the provincial government that millions of N95 masks are on route to Ontario. But these masks don't ever arrive. Health care staff need to be protected now or they will get sick. Not only will this be a personal tragedy for them and their families, but as large numbers of nurses, cleaners, personal support workers (PSWs) and other staff become infected, they risk infecting their co-workers, hospital patients and long-term care residents," says Candace Rennick, Secretary-Treasurer of CUPE Ontario.

CUPE in Ontario represents about 90,000 frontline staff health staff. On Thursday April 2, those working in hospital and long-term care will join a workplace sticker day to advocate for patient and resident and staff safety through adequate protection for health care workers; testing of patients and residents and the identification and segregation of persons with the infection. Following collective action, Alberta health care staff coming within two metres of a suspected, presumed or confirmed COVID-19 patient will now have access to an N95 mask.

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