

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 23, 2020

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Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Dr. Njoo, along with other officials from GAC, PS, CBSA, ISC, SC, ISED, AgCan, IRCC and ESDC. Dr. Njoo began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. Globally, as of today there are 340,000 cases in 189 countries. As of noon today, there are 1474 cases and 20 deaths in Canada. 100,000 people have been tested.

Final number of call participants: 226

Number of questions unanswered: 2

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- MP Mike Lake (CPC; Edmonton – Wetaskiwin): On March 12, a person infected with COVID-19 met with 20 MPs. I had a minor cough and minor fever, it was suggested that I be tested but I've not been called to be tested yet. It seems odd that 20 MPs who have been exposed to COVID-19 would not be tested. Given that this seems concerning, how many people in Canada should be tested that haven't been tested. How long does it take to get test results back.
 - o Dr. Njoo: Testing is a provincial authority, Alberta would have to take lead on testing in this case. Can't speak to provincial testing regimes, public health officials across the country have agreed upon an approach to testing, but there are many factors to consider when it comes to being exposed. Would advise to follow up with local public health officials.
 - o With testing in Canada, its based on need related to one's symptoms, and factors like travel or employment. The testing regime in Canada has been doing very well. 2060 people tested per millionth person here in Canada. Over 102,000 tests have been done where tests results are available. That's over 100,000 negative tests. If a sample is sent to the NML, the turnaround is 1 day for a test.
- MP Scott Davidson (CPC; York – Simcoe): Fire services in my riding only have about 2 days left of PPE, is there a federal contact who can work to distribute more PPE. Is there a count on all the PPE available in the country?

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- Dr. Njoo: Provincial government is the lead on distributing PPE as appropriate. Federal role is just procurement. We will contact province to see if there's a number fire chiefs can call for more PPE.
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- Senator Yonah Martin (CPC): There are 7 children who are in Haiti who have been part of a 5 year adoption process. There's a March 29th flight out of Montreal, but they are not registered as Canadians abroad. Can the embassy in Haiti say if the embassy is aware of the children, and if there's someone overseeing their case. Would someone at the embassy accompany the children on the flight?
 - Dr. Njoo: Might be a conversation to take offline.
 - GAC: It seems the citizenship and adoption processes isn't finished, and this is an IRCC lead, but its important to make sure the right processes are followed.
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- MP Mark Dalton (CPC; Pitt Meadows – Maple Ridge): Can these calls be transcribed and sent to MPs and offline contacts. What is being done in terms of maternity leave benefits for those who are being told to stay home, as they may not have enough hours to qualify for maternity leave. What program is available for mothers in maternity leave right now.
 - ESDC: The emergency care benefit will give 950 bi-weekly, if anyone has been affected by COVID then they would qualify. Maternity and paternity leave would be covered under these new programs.
 - Senator Mike Duffy (ISG): I have received calls from a family in PEI who have family in missionary groups in Honduras. Will there be repatriation flights for Canadians there on humanitarian work.
 - GAC: We are working on two flights to Honduras within the next few days, as long as they are registered on the Canadians abroad list. It applies to all Canadian citizens and permanent residents.
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- Senator Mary Jane McCallum (ISG): There's an understanding that the federal government will allocate more money for homeless populations in Winnipeg, where 70% of homeless there are indigenous. Can the government confirm this?
 - ESDC: There is a reaching home initiative to support homeless populations, but there's not much details on there yet. There's other supports, such as 50 mil to women's shelters, and other programs that specifically target certain vulnerable populations.
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- MP Laurel Collins (NDP; Victoria): In regards to the 5,000 dollar loan offered to Canadians abroad, is the loan interest free and can it be accessed after the fact. Do repatriation efforts include permeant residents. How are PRs being supported in Canada.
 - GAC: The emergency funds are for Canadians abroad, and currently doesn't provide funds once they're in Canada. There is a 180 day interest free period. In terms of permanent residences and flights, CanCits are given priority, unless the PR is part of a family group. They will be included only if space is available but there is no guarantee.
 - ESDC: PR getting EI benefits is tied to employment, if they had earnings in the last year then they would.
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- MP Kelly McCauley (CPC; Edmonton West): What is the government doing to speed up the process of acquiring more medical supplies and ventilators.
 - Dr, Njoo: We are looking at the needs of the provinces to prepare a bulk purchase of medical supplies as needed ASAP. Things are being done across government in a much more accelerated way.

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- MP Paul Manly (NDP; Nanaimo – Ladysmith) : Will there be an increase in old age security funds. Current measures are geared towards family, but are their plans for seniors specifically.
 - o ESDC: Haven't heard of anything to date on this specifically, but will connect with colleagues that work on OAS.
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- MP Iqra Khalid (LPC; Mississauga – Erin Mills): Is there advice for parliamentarians to make sure were spreading positive information and not inducing panic. What's being done to combat fake news.
 - o Dr. Njoo: There has been a lot of misinformation so far, but direct people to credible sites to get information as it relates to Canada. Probably go to the CDC website in the US, or the WHO site. Examples in Canada include that websites like Facebook are directing people to the PHAC website. Security agencies are taking threat seriously.
 - o CBSA: Border information service is a source where people can get straight facts on border measures and exclusions.
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- Senator Peter Boehm (ISG): Have there been any decisions made to close missions abroad, or in terms of bringing non-essential staff home. Are they being ordered into self isolation.
 - o Non-essential staff are being evacuated and are undergoing self-isolation, but embassies are still operating and there are no mission closures.
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- MP Luc Theriault (BQ; Montcalm): What do students who do not have enough hours worked to qualify for EI do to get support?
 - o ESDC: As long as they have made more then \$5,000 a year, they are eligible.
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- Richard Cannings (NDP; South Okanagan – West Kootenany): What is the latest update on the seasonal workers program. Are flights from Mexico still happening.
 - o AgCan: Seasonal and agricultural workers will be let into the country. We have been working across government to coordinate how this will work exactly, and will have more info soon.
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- MP Gord Johns (Courtenay-Alberni): Staff who work for RCMP and Postal workers not getting proper PPE. Workers who no longer have income are still very concerned on how they will support themselves.
 - o ESDC: People will receive 950 a month, as long as they've made at least 5,000 a month. Program will sending out money in April, for people who have been affected by no fault of their own.
 - o Dr. Njoo: Guidance for federal workers has put various guidelines for workers. For postal workers, not sure what the risk is for those workers who are handling packages. Delivery people have no risk as there should be no chance of interaction with everyone self isolating. RCMP should have the right equipment for the right situation, especially as first responders.
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- MP Carol Hughes (NDP; Algoma – Manitoulin – Kapuskasing): If someone has lost their job or is laid off due to COVID, will they have to wait the one week period and wait the 28 days to receive their assistance. Can you elaborate on this. Can we get a list of officials who we can address our specific questions to. Is there a way to listen to federal calls to vulnerable indigenous populations.
 - o ESDC: Anyone who's taking care of someone with COVID or who is quarantining, is covered. The benefit covers anyone who has been generally affected by COVID-19 and is widespread. There are issues in being able to process these new claims, and were looking into it.
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- ISC: There are daily calls with regional communities, and regional executives. There is a sensitivity issue, and limited teleconferencing abilities, so we have not opened it up to observers in order to respect the direct relationship. We are on top of communities who are risk at flooding.
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Please note that this report is a working draft and is for internal PHAC use only. If you have any questions/comments, please let me know.

Best,

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