

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 24, 2020

From : "Brickles, Spencer (PHAC/ASPC)" <spencer.brickles@canada.ca>

To: "Cluney, Craig (PHAC/ASPC)" <craig.cluney@canada.ca>, "StJames, Louise (PHAC/ASPC)" <louise.stjames@canada.ca>, "Lavoie, Marlene (PHAC/ASPC)" <marlene.lavoie@canada.ca>, "Gargum, Taha (PHAC/ASPC)" <taha.gargum@canada.ca>, "Frost, Evan (PHAC/ASPC)" <evan.frost@canada.ca>, "Osei, Peggy (PHAC/ASPC)" <peggy.osei@canada.ca>, "Novak, Krystal (PHAC/ASPC)" <krystal.novak@canada.ca>, "Beaudoin, John (PHAC/ASPC)" <john.beaudoin@canada.ca>

Date: Tue, 24 Mar 2020 21:53:17 +0000

Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Rhonda Kropp, along with other officials from GAC, PS, CBSA, ISC, SC, ISED, IRCC, PSPC and ESDC. Ms. Kropp began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. Globally, as of today there 380,000 cases in 195 countries. As of noon today there are 2176 cases in Canada and 25 deaths. 120,000 people have been tested. We are now at an equal mix of travel and community related cases. 220 repatriated Canadians were released from CFB Trenton today. Others who tested positive will remain along with their asymptomatic contacts, whose quarantine has been reset.

Final number of call participants: 188

Number of questions unanswered: 13

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- MP Rachel Harder(CPC; Lethbridge): Multiple women on maternity leave who have been laid off in her riding are asking if they are eligible for sick leave and EI benefits, and will their maternity leave stay intact
 - o ESDC: The department is looking at how to best situate the new programs to deal with these types of issues, but don't have details yet. This situation is being figured into the policy.
- Senator Paula Simons (ISG): Speaking with President of the Alberta Chamber of Commerce. His members are supposed to fill out records of employment but they apparently need secret passwords and letters from Ottawa in order to get forms for employees to register for EI. Is there any way for this paperwork to be expedited.
 - o ESDC: We're meeting with national chambers of commerce to discuss the particulars of the new EI programs, but this does sound bizarre. This issue will be addressed at a later meeting with the Chambers of Commerce.
- MP Tamara Jensen (CPC; Cloverdale—Langley City) : A constituent expected his temporary foreign workers (TFW) in yesterday, however, they were booted off flights from Mexico as they are not Canadian citizens or Permanent Residents, and thus not prioritized. What is the situation with the TFW program.

-
- ESDC: We are making exemptions for TFW based on their important role. GAC may be able to deal with this.
 - GAC: This is an IRCC problem.
 - IRCC: The permits have been issued, the people should be on their way but its more of a boarding problem for CBSA.
 - CBSA: We are not aware of the specific issue, but there is direction from Transport Canada based on who can or cannot board. The exemptions for TFW have not been signed off yet, but they will be soon so they can be brought into Canada soon to self isolate and work.
-
- MP Mike Lake (CPC; Edmonton – Wetaskiwin): Day 12 since his last meeting with infected person who met with MPs, and he won't have results back until day 16. What is the current inventory of unused testing kits and what's being done to get that number up. There are at least 4-5 MPs in the House today who also met the COVID infected person, have any of those MPs been tested?
 - Ms. Kropp: There are clear frustrations with test times. FPT partners are having regular discussions on testing and working to flatten the curve. The NML has been making tests to deal with the shortages. Issues revolve around the number of tests and the time it takes to get test times turned around. We also need to prioritize those that need to do need testing right away. Cant speak if the MPs have been tested, but there are contacts for those individuals to reach out to. Testing is a very important issue in the FPT space. We're looking to get more advanced tests produced.
-
- MP Kelly McCauley (CPC; Edmonton West): What is the goal for the amount of respirators/ventilators that Canada will need?
 - Ms. Kropp: There's an issue of a number of different supplies in Canada. The number needed is going to depend on the forecasting of the epidemic curve, and if we are flattening the curve enough. Will be influenced by the seriousness's of symptoms people will have. Constant conversations on what materials are in short supply and the number needed in supply, but there is no specific number available for the number we need right now. We are forecasting this with P/Ts.
-
- MP Mark Dalton (CPC; Pitt Meadows – Maple Ridge): What is the government doing to secure and produce medical supplies, as it looks like were going to have great need of these supplies.
 - Ms. Kropp: There are a number of proactive pieces of work being undertaken. There are a number of departments who are having conversations with industry partners to identify priority medical equipment, and working on how we rally these industries to work towards a common goal, and not stopping any current supply chain of these vital materials.
 - ISED: We are working with industry, there have been strong responses for calls for help. We are working with a number of companies who want to produce ventilators. There are active conversations taking place, and we are also working with existing suppliers of ventilators to make sure their supplies are still flowing.
 - PSPC: We are always looking for available units. We have secured 570 more ventilators, and whenever we have a lead to a company that can supply materials, we work to make deals.
-
- MP Wayne Easter (LPC; Malpeque): Truckers are considered an essential service, but we are having problems with truckers being recognized in PEI as an essential service.

-
- CBSA: A truck driver looking to get a new permit will sometimes go across the border and back to “flagpole” their permits faster, a system that has now been discontinued. That could be the issue.
 - IRCC: For any work permits for within Canada, they should apply with IRCC. We are strongly encouraging people to not flagpole, and to apply online.
-
- MP Laurel Collins (NDP; Victoria): The borders are closed to irregular crossings, but what are happening to people who already in the asylum seeking process.
 - IRCC: CBSA is directing back asylum claimants to the US for public health advice. For those in Canada, we have limited capacity. But we have an email that people can reach out to and register, but have to make sure people have access to interim federal health and are registered.
 - CBSA: This new process applies to all common irregular border checkpoints.
-
- MP Judy Sgro (LPC; Humber River—Black Creek): Concerned with the 1 million who have applied for EI. Where are we getting the departmental staff to handle the new workload and to process the claims.
 - ESDC: It is a challenge, we have BOC plans in place to help health and safety. We’ve had huge inroads to teleworking and its going very well. Its augmenting tele-capacity that will be a key feature for the future.
-
- MP Paul Manly (NDP; Nanaimo – Ladysmith): People in Nanaimo-Ladysmith are worried about paying rent when they don’t have income, is the government going to be stopping evictions? The 10% wage subsidy is just not enough, and businesses are going to need more help, when is there going to be better relief for business owners.
 - Ms. Kropp: We don’t have finance colleagues on line.
 - ESDC: We are looking at a number of benefits and measures so that people don’t have to be laid off. Soon there will be different measures announced, and we’re looking at all available means to keep workers on board.
 - ISED: The government has announced an injection of funds into businesses and we continue to monitor the response to this. Crown corps are key for injecting liquidity. The situation remains quite fluid and the department is working on solutions
-
- MP Jeremy Patzer (CPC; Cypress Hills – Grasslands): Will we continue to process new visa applications or just people who are currently in the system (i.e. Students and temporary foreign workers).
 - IRCC: Our capacity right now is at bare minimum as staff have been pulled back from missions. We must look at and prioritize our current case loads.
-

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,

Spencer Brickles
Parliamentary Affairs, Office of Strategic Policy and Planning
Public Health Agency of Canada / Government of Canada
spencer.brickles@canada.ca / Tel: 343-543-3102

Affaires parlementaire, Bureau des politiques et de la planification stratégiques
Agence de la santé publique du Canada / Gouvernement du Canada
spencer.brickles@canada.ca /Tél: 343-543-3102