

**TRANSCRIPTION/TRANSCRIPTION
BRIEFING/MISE À JOUR**

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DATE/DATE: March 25, 2020 4:30 p.m. ET

LOCATION/ENDROIT: Teleconference

PRINCIPALS/PRINCIPAUX: Rhonda Crock, Director General, Health Operations Centre

SUBJECT/SUJET: The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) holds a daily COVID-19 technical briefing for Parliamentarians.

Moderator: Good afternoon and welcome to the technical briefing to Parliamentarians on the government's response to Covid 19. Joining us today are the following departments and agencies: Employment and Social Development Canada, Service Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, Canada Revenue Agency, Finance Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Innovation Science and Economic Development, Public Safety Canada, Public Service and Procurement Canada.

Bonjour et bienvenue à la séance d'information technique aux Parlementaires sur la réponse du gouvernement à propos du Covid. 19. Les ministères et organismes suivants se joignent à nous aujourd'hui : Emplois et Développement Social Canada, Service Canada, Affaires étrangères Canada, Agence des services frontaliers Canada, Agriculture et agroalimentaire Canada, Agence du Revenu du Canada, le Département de la Finance, Immigration, réfugiés et citoyenneté Canada, Services autochtones Canada, Innovation, Science et Développement Économique, Services Publics et Approvisionnement Canada et Sécurité Publique du Canada.

Please note callers will be permitted one question each. We would ask that you keep the question to 60 seconds as there are many callers on the line who wish to have a chance to ask their question. Veuillez noter que vous pouvez poser une question à la fois. Nous vous demandons de limiter la question à environ 60 secondes car il y a de nombreux appelants sur la ligne qui souhaitent avoir la possibilité de poser leur question.

Please identify yourself and inform us which riding you represent. Veuillez s'il vous plait vous identifier et nous informer de la circonscription que vous représentez. I would like to turn the meeting over to Ms. Rhonda Crock (ph), director general of the Public Health Agency of Canada for the Health portfolio operations centre. J'aimerais maintenant céder la parole à Mme Rhonda Crock, directeur général du Centre des opérations du portefeuille de la Santé. À vous la parole Madame Crock.

Rhonda Crock : Merci Louise et merci tout le monde pour être ici aujourd'hui. We are delighted to be here today to answer questions from Parliamentarians and Senators related to Covid 19. I'd also like to thank my partner departments for being on the line today. We'll start the call with a brief update both in English and French in terms of the current epidemiology of the infection in Canada and globally and then we will turn it over to questions.

Globally there were over 420,000 cases in over 190 countries currently where we are. There have been 19,374 deaths reported and more than 113,000 recoveries. In Canada there are currently 3,197 cases and 27 deaths in Canada as well. As of this morning Quebec is reporting 1,013 cases which is an increase from what we've seen before and this is partly due to a change in their testing methodology.

Over 142,154 people have been tested for Covid 19 in Canada and approximately 10,000 people are being tested per day in Canada. Currently there's about an equal mix of travel related cases and community spread of Covid 19 across the country. Maintenant en français.

Unidentified Female: Bonjour. À l'échelle mondiale il y a plus de 420,000 cas dans plus de 190 pays. Il y a eu à présent 19,374 décès et plus de 113,000 personnes sont guéries. Au Canada nous avons au moment 3,197 cas et 27 décès. Ce matin le Québec a rapporté 1,013 cas. L'augmentation du nombre de cas au Québec est largement attribuable à leur nouvelle méthodologie de tests.

Plus de 142,154 personnes ont subi un test de dépistage de Covid 19 au Canada. Il y a environ 10,000 personnes qui sont testées par jour ici au Canada. Il y a un mélange égal de cas liés aux voyages et de propagation dans la communauté. Merci.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. Just to let folks know we have Dr. Anne Marie (unintelligible) also from Public Health Agency of Canada joining me on the call today to answer questions. Moderator Patrick, we will take the first question please.

Operator: Thank you, merci. Please press *1 at this time if you have a question. Vous pouvez appuyer *1 maintenant pour poser une question. The first question is from Mary Jane McCallum. Please go ahead.

Senator McCallum: Thank you for that. I wanted to look at – I'm revisiting a problem that was identified by Senator Simons on a previous teleconference. It's related to the ongoing travel of workers at work camps at different resource extraction sites across Canada.

I wanted to register my concern in the hopes of closing the loophole that has yet to be adequately addressed and by which the transmission of infection is a very real possibility.

In an attempt to further flatten the curve we need to address the area of worker transportation and their social distancing considerations. Workers are still being transported to camps traveling across Canada to do so. Many of these camps are located close to Indigenous communities who represent a very vulnerable population.

In correspondence I received yesterday I was told “the Site C camp in BC is still operating and that is an issue under much debate right now. Somewhat under duress it seems BC Hydro is now reducing work somewhat and the number of workers staying at the camp however it is reported that 16 Site C workers with flu like symptoms are in isolation rooms at the camp. From the media reports it is very unclear if they have been tested.

There is of course concern locally about the likelihood of an outbreak starting in the camp, especially with the fly in workers. The oil and gas field seems to be operating close to normal.” My question is how will your departments work to reduce or close these work camps which are modes of transmission with a real potential to impact communities across Canada.

As well can you inform us of why the federal government has not gotten involved in limiting or mitigating the spread of disease for these fly in workers when they have gotten involved with other forms of air travel including commercial? Thank you.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the question and for raising your concerns. I really do appreciate that. I don't know a great deal about what is happening in individual work camps within individual jurisdictions.

At the federal level we are working very closely with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure we are creating guidance that is evidence based to create the situations that will minimize the likelihood of spread of the infection.

Our expectation and hope is that guidance will be used across the country in different settings where there is the possibility of spread. Certainly work camps is one of those situations where you have people housed close together.

The federal provincial and territorial governments are working very closely together and meeting on multiple occasions every week to ensure we're discussing the latest evidence related to Covid 19 and its transmission and are updating our evidence based guidelines based on that new information regularly.

Again in terms of the particular situation with the camps you're mentioning, I'm sorry I don't know the details of that but the federal government is putting forth the guidance necessary to inform employers, to inform businesses, to inform provinces and territories and the healthcare sector about the best ways to avoid transmission of the virus in close settings and in all settings in fact.

I apologize that I don't know about those particular camps but from the federal

perspective we are providing the guidance that would allow folks to apply the general infection control principles to their own settings. Our hope would be that would be applied in those work camps as well. Thank you very much for that question. Patrick, can we have the next question please?

Operator: The next question is from Rachael Harder. Please go ahead.

Rachael Harder: My question has to do in regards to funeral service providers or funeral services. As of now they're not deemed essential services. That's a problem because of course death is a natural part of the life cycle.

Having access to the necessary precautionary measures and being able to keep their doors open and their employees going, all of these concerns have been expressed by a number of funeral services in my riding. I'm wondering if a comment can be made with regards to this.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you so much for that question. I can say that certainly provinces and territories are looking very close at defining the essential workers within their jurisdictions and likewise the federal government is working with its partners to look at those lists as well. I might ask if my colleague from Public Safety, Jean-François Duprez may have a comment on that. I believe there may be a working group looking at that issue.

Jean-François Duprez: Merci Rhonda. The government of Canada has a strategy for critical infrastructure where key sectors have been identified. We have to be clear that the government of Canada does not issue certificates for essential services. However we have identified in the context of Covid 19 a number of areas deemed essential should there be restriction of movement.

Those are food supplies and distribution, energy, water and waste water, digital and communication infrastructure and transport. Those are areas that we want to ensure that the services will be maintained. As you mentioned Rhonda, the provincial authorities have the flexibility to identify which services and which workers are deemed essential within their jurisdiction.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you so much. Thank you for the question. Patrick, can we have the next question please?

Operator: The next question is from Dave Epp. Please go ahead.

Dave Epp: Thank you very much. Is anyone aware has Health Canada rolled out the protocols for quarantining for isolation for temporary foreign guest workers? Obviously the issue is crucial across many ridings across our food security and also vital that the protocol is right for the safety of Canadians. I know many parts of

industry, local health units are waiting for that framework which was promised shortly the last time I asked the question.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the question. I can say the government of Canada take the issue of temporary foreign workers and their wellbeing and the wellbeing of all Canadians very seriously. I know that issue continues to be looked at and that guidance will be forthcoming. At this point I can't say much more about that topic. Next question please.

Operator: The next question is from Cathy McLeod. Please go ahead.

Cathy McLeod: Thank you. I know with the announcement today of the emergency benefits that it is recommended that everyone have the CRA My Account. It used to be a pretty complicated process. I'm just wondering if we can have a quick update in terms of – or can you send around information around creating a CRA My Account.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. I'm going to transfer that to my CRA colleagues on the line. Jess, do you have a comment or Frank?

Frank of CRA: This is Frank here. I'm happy to comment on that. Just to let you know that to start out with there will be two ways for people to apply for the benefit at the CRA. One is through My Account through the portal and the other one is through an automated IDR. They'll both be very simple ways to do it.

Also let you know you can access the My CRA Account by going through the My Service Canada Account. To the extent that someone has one of the two portals they can make the application that way. The other way as I said is through the IDR. As far as signing up for My Account and roughly half of Canadians have either My Account or My Service Canada Account.

You go in there. You're asked a number of questions in terms of identification, social insurance number, something about your previous tax year or the one before and so it's several questions.

Then you do a number of things to set up security in terms of establishing questions so you can recover your password. I think it's a fairly simple process and that Canadians have got used to this type of setting up these accounts for many of their other online purposes.

Cathy McLeod: So there's no mail PIN anymore because that used to be part of the process.

Frank of CRA: It still is. If you want to sign up for a My Service Canada Account there is essentially – sorry, My Account, there's two ways to get the

security number. One is to wait for it in the mail. The other one is to call one of our agents. They will email you the number right away.

Beyond that I'll say that you don't need to wait for the security code to be able to apply for the new benefit. You get through the first phase, setting up an account which we call My Account Light for short. You put the information we ask you and you can immediately put in an application.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for your question. Patrick, la prochaine question.

Operator: The next question is from Laurel Collins. Please go ahead.

Laurel Collins: My question is in terms of the eligibility for folks. I was looking through the government's announcement and for people who might not have been applying for EI who for whatever reason may not have been working last year but now are looking for a job, are they going to be eligible for this benefit?

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the question. I'm going to ask my colleague Chris at ESDC to address this one.

Chris at ESDC: With that there's two criteria that you've been affected somehow by Covid 19 and that you did earn at least \$5,000 in the previous year. We tried to develop that so that it would be a pretty low bar so the majority of Canadians would meet it. Again I think this is one of the first measures we've looked at introducing and so in that case the person would not be eligible to qualify if they didn't meet those two criteria.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for your question. Patrick, the next question please.

Operator: The next question is from David Sweet. Please go ahead.

David Sweet: Thank you very much. I'll be brief. From my research the jurisdictions that have been able to flatten the curve and had the least amount of economic disruption are the ones that as they say test, test, test. In all the briefings I've heard on a day to day basis I have not heard any strategy for us to acquire more testing capability.

Could you update us on that? I understand a vaccine is a long term solution but short term if we can test we know who to isolate. That makes it easier for people that need the work to work knowing that the people are healthy around them.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. It's a great question. You

point out the fundamental situation underlying flattening the curve. We need to be certain that we understand and reduce those that are susceptible to the infection. We want to reduce that pool. We also are impacted by the virulence of the contagiousness of the virus.

You can't do much about the contagiousness of the virus but we can impact the number who are susceptible both through vaccination. We don't have a vaccine yet but as you mentioned there's a great deal of work going on in that area. Second, by isolating those that are infected from those that continue to be susceptible.

And in particular those who are very vulnerable as we've mentioned before, those in the older age cohort or who have concurrent medical conditions or a reduced immune system who tend to have a more harsh experience with the virus than other portions of our population.

You have a very good point. As I mentioned before, the federal provincial territorial governments meet regularly to talk about all sorts of things related to Covid 19. Testing figures prominently in those conversations. There are a few things being done. One is we are very actively ensuring we understand what the test kit situation is across the jurisdictions.

We are looking at doing things like bulk procurement to ensure we are getting the testing kits we need in terms of numbers. In addition to the kits there's the issue of the reagents which are in limited supply as well. Our national microbiology lab has been working internally on determining whether or not we can help produce that reagent and reduce that speed bump in the testing process.

The third thing is understanding and having agreement across the country on who are the people we need to be testing, what is that testing strategy. If we do have a limited number of tests even if we put the other procedures in place that I mentioned we still need to make sure we're using those tests judiciously, targeting and triaging the tests to those that really need it.

Of course there are a lot of people who have a lot of fear, very understandable fear in the community and across Canada who are afraid and would like to have tests even if they don't have symptoms or don't have any reason to have been exposed.

We need to ensure we are targeting those limited test kits to those who really need it. The provinces and territories and federal government have been working together on a testing strategy. The principles would be applied consistently across the various jurisdictions.

How it will be applied will differ because as you noted different jurisdictions are having different experiences and are in different stages of this epidemic. While there are some that are heavily linked still to travel there are others that have switched over to community spread primarily. Across the country as a whole we're not at half and half

as I mentioned earlier.

Those general principles being worked on across the jurisdictions including the federal government do help to ensure that we across the country have a set of consistent principles regarding testing that's being applied in a way that is specific to the needs of the jurisdiction.

I can assure you that the issue of testing is front and centre. We are looking at these supplies and ensuring we have an adequate supply and ensuring that the supply we have is being used appropriately and triaged to those who most need it. Thank you very much for the question. Patrick, la prochaine question s'il vous plait.

Operator: The next question is from Paul Manly. Please go ahead.

Paul Manly: Thank you very much for these briefings. One thing I wanted to draw attention to is people who are being laid off are also losing their medical benefits. This is having a cascading effect. My question is about Reaching Home. I was talking to the person that runs United Way Central Vancouver Island.

Their question is when are they going to find out, when are they going to get an agreement for the new Reaching Home program. How much money are they going to get? We've seen all the rec centres closing down here, all kinds of facilities, restaurants closing down.

Our homeless population doesn't have a place to use a bathroom, a place to wash their hands. The shelters are overcrowded. They need to move people into other spaces. All of the non-profits here are crushed. They're losing donations.

They're losing staff. They're losing their ability to provide the services they need to provide. They're wondering when this Reaching Home money is going to reach them so they can do the work they need to do so we don't get a spread in our homeless population.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. You raise a great question. There were a lot of questions packed in that statement but I think I'll start and then pass it over to my colleagues in Finance to see if they have any comments.

You mentioned a very important vulnerable population, the homeless. We know and have spoken about this population on these calls before. They have figured prominently in our conversations in the federal provincial territorial space. We recognize that is a population that needs attention. I'm going to see if my Finance colleagues have anything to add in regards to the financial aspects of this question.

Unidentified Male: Nothing to add from my perspective.

Rhonda Crock: Do any of the other partners on the line have any comments to make on the other questions? I know part of the question you've asked is related to provincial and territorial mandates so I understand some of our colleagues may not be able to address but is there anybody else on the line who wishes to speak?

Chris at ESDC: The Reaching Home initiative does fall within the ESDC portfolio, just over \$150 million to help the homeless people who have been adversely affected by Covid 19. We're currently working on implementation as quickly as we can. I can't give you any timelines on that but we are well aware of the urgent need and are trying our best to expedite the money going to not for profits.

We're also looking at the not for profit sector more broadly recognizing this is also impacting them and the important role they play in the community, again looking at strategies to support that sector through some of our existing programs as well as different ideas with potential new ideas.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much for the question. Next question Patrick.

Operator: The next question is from Carol Hughes. Please go ahead.

Carol Hughes: Thank you very much. I'm really impressed by all the work everybody is doing. I want to thank you for these briefings. I just want to ask again if there's a possibility we can get a briefing for our staff when it comes to employment insurance changes.

It's something that is extremely important so if that could happen. My question is with respect to self-isolation. I know the Minister is set to table mandatory legislation this evening based on what I've heard. I'm wondering how that's going to roll out. I have complained over and over again about people who are not self-isolating especially we see business people not doing it.

It's very problematic. I'm wondering what that mandatory designation how the enforcement is going to work and whether there will be a hotline there. We have municipalities that are saying they're doing the bare minimum because they want to protect their budget.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much, really do appreciate the question. There was legislation put in place last night. It went into effect at 12:01 a.m. this morning and that was regarding mandatory isolation of travelers when they return to Canada.

It does require travelers who are asymptomatic when they arrive at the airport to self-isolate and travelers who are symptomatic to isolate either in a facility that is federal government assigned, a particular site where we would be providing monitoring and

assessment or in their home.

I understand your question and your concern regarding compliance and enforcement of those types of orders. One of the reasons for putting that mandatory isolation legislation in place is in order to ensure we have the ability to do that compliance and enforcement activity. For the general population who is meant to be self-isolating at this time, that continues to be a recommendation and the provinces and territories are dealing with those situations within their jurisdiction.

I understand it can be terribly frustrating when there has been clear public health advice issued and some Canadians are choosing not to follow that advice. I think our Prime Minister and our Chief Public Health Officer and Deputy Chief Public Health Officer and Ministers as well have been doing an amazing job of sharing the information on how to keep Canadians safe and how to keep yourself safe.

In terms of self-isolation, social distancing, hygiene, handwashing there's been great efforts put in place to ensure that message is being heard loud and clear. The new order in council you mentioned that went into enforcement this morning at 12:01.

It's another effort to ensure for those that are traveling back to Canada there is a very hard line in terms of protecting the public health of Canadians in regards to those returning travelers. I thank you very much for the question. I know we're at 5:00 but I'm going to allow another few questions. Patrick, the next question.

Operator: The next question is from Elizabeth May. Please go ahead.

Elizabeth May: Thank you very much. I'm glad for the last question in response to Carol's question. You clarified that was an order in council under the existing Quarantine Act so we didn't pass any legislation we weren't noticing when we went through everything yesterday.

My question is about foreign students. It's clear they're allowed to return to Canada if they're out of the country because the closure of the US border or other borders allows people with valid work permits or student permits to be here.

My concern is I don't see where they would qualify for any emergency relief help. There are thousands of foreign students in Canada. Do we have any plans? Is any part of government looking at how to make sure they can access relief funds to pay their bills and their rent?

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. Thank you also for the clarification. My language of course as a public health professional I'm saying legislation when I meant OIC. Thank you for that. In terms of your question Ms. May I'm going to see if ESDC, our colleague Chris is able to address that.

Chris at ESDC: I don't really have much to say on that one. I'm not aware of anything that's currently taking place within the initial batch of supports that's been announced to directly target internationally trained students.

With the new benefit we did try to set the bar pretty low so that even people that may have worked part time would be able to meet that \$5,000 within the past year criteria. We need to do some further analysis for those who still fall between the cracks and I'm sure we'll be looking at that in the near term.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. Patrick, next question.

Operator: The next question is from Mary Coyle. Please go ahead.

Senator Coyle: Mary Coyle from Nova Scotia. Further questioning around our testing strategy which you mentioned earlier. You mentioned that the nationally and provincially you're working together on that strategy. I'd like to hear a bit more about when that strategy will be in place. I understand it's unfolding.

That's the first part. The second part is the concern around availability of materials you highlighted. You mentioned there's a stock taking of the test kit situation across the country. There's bulk procurement and even some possibly manufacturing of the scarce reagents necessary.

Could you tell us right now where we stand in terms of availability of all the types of materials, the kits, the swabs, the reagents etc. for testing? How many we have on order, where they're coming from, when we will get them and any concerns you might have about this procurement of what we're going to need to scale up the testing as we roll this out.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the question. I won't repeat what I said before but perhaps I'll add a few additional pieces of information. I did mention a testing strategy is being put into place with the federal provincial territorial partners.

To be honest that strategy is already being played out as we move forward in terms of recommending testing for certain portions of the population, people who have traveled and returned, people who have been contacts of those who have been diagnosed as positive with Covid 19 and other certain populations that we may need to figure out how to ensure we are testing them over time.

That's definitely being worked through and is in general being applied across the provinces and territories. You raise another question that we have not yet addressed and that is the question of how are we ensuring that we have these supplies and materials we need going forward.

It's one thing to know what set of materials and supplies we need today but the work we're doing with the provinces and territories is looking beyond that to try to forecast what we may need in the future and where we may have shortages going forward.

The stock taking is not just for what's needed today but what may be needed going forward depending on where the curve ends up taking us and how successful our interventions have been in flattening the curve. The planning is not for the best case situation. It's planning for what could be our worst case situation.

There's a number of different supplies and capacity building needed in the healthcare system to ensure we are ready for a worst case scenario. The conversations for the federal provincial territorial partners have not focused just on testing kits but on that whole spectrum of materials and services we need to ensure we have in place.

One way to ensure that we will have those in place in Canada is by doing our best to ensure our Canadian industries are supported and have the venues to discuss how to ensure we are responsibly using the supply chain.

As you can imagine if we make a decision about the equipment we may need in Canada and then every different industry goes off and starts to make their own equipment using up parts of the supply chain, that's not going to work.

We have to ensure the different parts of the supply chain are being judiciously used towards those items we really do need to use in Canada. I may pass the floor to my colleagues in ISED and PSPC to see if they have any comments on some of the things the federal government is doing to stimulate industry to support the Covid 19 response.

Patrick at ISED: It's Patrick from ISED. One of our priorities is working with a number of companies, I'll call it several hundred companies in the manufacturing sector who have offered support to support Canadians and frontline healthcare workers.

Our goal as the Minister stated is to use the program levers across the department and across the federal government to support building up capacity. Several announcements were made last week and even this week on the vaccine and the therapy side. The programs are looking at how we can best support companies using the BDC, EDC, the Strategic Innovation Fund.

That's an active conversation and we're also doing partnering, looking to build relationships with existing medical device companies who are looking to scale up and having them partner with companies in the automotive sector who have the capabilities that will be interesting for scaling up whether it's PPE or medical devices. That is an active part of the department's and the federal government's strategy.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks for the question, really appreciate it. Let's do two more questions. I know we're over the half hour but I don't want to stop people

from having their opportunity to ask their questions. Let's do two more. Patrick can we have the next one?

Operator: The next question is from Gord Johns. Please go ahead.

Gord Johns: My question is around a couple of things around worker safety. I'm getting a lot of people from different sectors, RCMP, Canada Post, dental workers, people working at the pet food store wondering what their rights are in terms of they're deemed an essential service or they're allowed to continue to work in their sector but they're afraid to work in the workplace.

I know each province is different but I'm wondering if there's going to be some federal coordination to ensure workers know what their rights are and we're protecting them and giving them the right to make a decision whether they want to put their health and safety at risk.

The other thing is around testing, ensuring that small communities, rural communities especially are able to get the numbers. If there's positive test results in their community.

We're finding the EOC's and the local hospitals and I know this varies from province but if they don't get the number it affects their ability to manage the crisis in their own community. They're requesting they get access to those numbers. It may be something to share with your provincial counterparts.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for that question. You raised a couple of really good points. I'm going to deal with your second question first. Your question about the numbers at the local level, we'd be delighted to share that feedback. We have an advisory committee call with the provinces and territories tomorrow. We will relay that back, thank you for that.

In regards to safety of workers I completely understand and can empathize with concerns workers may have about safety in the workplace and can empathize also with the employers who in an extraordinary situation need to provide some clear evidence based guidance to protect their workers and at the same time have concerns about their business.

This is a very difficult time for many people. What I can say from the federal level is we have definitely heard the ask for some clear guidance for workers and their environments. While the same general principles of infection prevention and control that we've spoken about for quite some time apply, we have been working on guidance that could be applied in different work settings.

That may help to inform employers and workers not necessarily of their rights which would sit within the provincial authority but to arm them with the information they need

to take the public health actions they need to protect themselves and protect others from getting infected.

There is work in the federal provincial territorial space to look at that guidance and ensure that is available for folks to make decisions. I'm delighted to move forward your question regarding having the numbers of cases not just at the provincial level but drilled down at a lower level to our provincial and territorial colleagues at our meeting tomorrow. Thank you very much for the question. We'll take one more please Patrick.

Operator: The next question is from Greg McLean. Please go ahead.

Greg McLean: Thanks for allowing the question. It's about Foreign Affairs and the flights to Peru. We're getting mixed messages that we're going to get some flights into Cusco where there are hundreds of Canadians still holed up. The situation is getting worse as we progress.

I understand one of the hotels has had a Covid outbreak. We have looked flatfooted as far as a nation in getting some flights to Peru to get people out of that country. If I can speak to somebody at Foreign Affairs that can get this process moving along a little more quickly and get an update on that, that would be very helpful.

Heather Jeffrey: It's Heather Jeffrey here from Foreign Affairs. We've had already two flights coming out of Lima each with 400 people. The other one was just wheeled up a few hours ago. We have other flights scheduled for Friday and flights out of Cusco that are being arranged to connect with that flight.

The initial flights were out of Lima because that is the easiest population to access. Obviously Cusco required different permissions. There's a lot of complicated logistics behind the scenes to move people from several different areas of Peru not just Cusco but also Iquitos and Arequipa and there are more flights that will be added as well for Peru next week.

It's a very large population, very dispersed geographically, a difficult country to move around in that is essentially under martial law. It's been a complicated logistical exercise but we have almost 1,000 Canadians that are out and many more coming, including for Cusco.

Just to offer you reassurance, I know it's a very anxiety inducing situation but those arrangements are in progress and communications are going out to travelers to let them know how to access flights. We will keep sending flights until people have a chance to depart.

Rhonda Crock: thank you very much for the question. With that we'll close the session today. I'd like to thank everybody on the call today for your questions and for the great work we know you're doing in your jurisdictions to protect

Canadians and keep them well and safe.

I want to thank my colleagues from the other departments who joined us today. I appreciate you being here and providing answers to the important questions that our partners on the phone are raising.

Just a reminder to stay safe and wash your hands and we look forward to continuing these calls and answering your questions as time goes on. Thank you very much everybody.

Operator: The conference has now ended. La conférence est maintenant terminée. Please disconnect your lines at this time. S'il vous plait raccrochez votre ligne. Thank you for your participation. Merci à tous les participants qui se sont joints.