

TRANSCRIPTION

BRIEFING

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DATE: March 27, 2020 4:30 p.m. ET

LOCATION: Teleconference

PRINCIPALS: Rhonda Crock, Director General, Health Operations Centre

SUBJECT: 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 Agri-food Canada, Canada Revenue Agency, Correctional Services Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Innovation Science and Economic Development, Public Safety Canada.

Please note callers will be permitted one question. 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.

Please identify yourself and inform us which riding you represent. I would like to turn the meeting over to Ms. Rhonda Crock (ph), director general of the Health portfolio operations centre. The line is yours Ms. Crock.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you, Louise and thank you to everyone for being here today. We are very happy to be able to provide this update to Parliamentarians and Senators this afternoon. As we do every day we will provide a brief overview of the current status both in English and French. Then we will open it up for questions. I will ensure our partners on the line have the correct questions directed towards them.

As Dr. Njoo announced today at the press conference, globally there are over 530,000 cases of Covid 19. In Canada there are 4,043 cases and unfortunately 39 deaths. In regards to testing in Canada 165,000 people have been tested which is 65,000 people tested since Monday. Canada currently has one of the highest rates of testing in the world and now in French.

Unidentified Female: Hello. As was announced today by Dr. Njoo, there are more than 530,000 Covid 19 cases globally. In Canada, we have more than 4,000 cases and 39 deaths. Also, 165,000 people have been tested, including 65,000 since Monday. Canada has one of the highest testing rates in the world.

Rhonda Crock: Patrick, we'll take the first question please

Operator: You may press *1 if you have a question. The first question is from Gerald Soroka.

Gerald Soroka: Gerald Soroka at Yellowhead riding. My question is regarding the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. Farmers in particular have quite a unique scenario because a lot of times they're working on the farm but because now their children are coming back because the schools are closed is there money available to hire someone to take care of their children while they're doing the farm work?

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for your question. I'm going to pass the floor over to our colleagues at ESDC. Then we'll turn to our colleagues at Agriculture if they have anything to add. Chris, do you have anything you'd like to reply?

ESDC: I think it's a bit outside the scope of the Emergency Response Benefit in that that's really about people who have been working who could receive up to \$5,000 in the previous twelve months and were without work for a consecutive 14 days in the past four weeks. If they met those criteria they still could be eligible for that. Other than that there could be wage subsidies as well that farmers might be eligible for that they could participate outside of the CERB.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much. I'll ask if our colleagues at Agriculture have anything to add.

Agriculture: I'll just add that as I've mentioned on the call before, given these unique circumstances we're continuing to look at some other options understanding that particularly for farmers there's some different types of concerns we need to be addressing. Hope to have more information on other measures soon.

Operator: The next question is from Easter Wayne. Please go ahead.

Wayne Easter: Wayne Easter, riding Malpeque. I would just agree with the question that was just asked. Seeing as I'm on the government side this is something I will be putting to my own people but there is another problem showing up in agriculture. That is the two weeks isolation for temporary foreign workers.

Farmers are extremely concerned about that extra cost and isolating for them two weeks. That's understandable it has to be done. However what we're hearing is especially from BC and Ontario farmers and some in PEI because of that added cost the ability to move to field crops like corn and soy bean and drop vegetable production – carrots, onions, cabbage – they are looking at doing that.

That could be a fresh vegetable food security problem for us. I don't think you have a solution there today. I don't expect you do but a heads up to Agriculture Canada. This will be a problem.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for that heads up. I know from the Public Health Agency of Canada side of the equation we've been working very closely with our colleagues to put forward public health guidelines that are important for the control of Covid 19 in our country and we do understand that will have an impact on the agriculture side of the house. I wonder Steve if you had anything you wanted to note on that comment.

Agriculture: We have been having very regular conversations both with industry as well as with provincial and territorial counterparts, very aware of that situation and know the urgency it presents in terms of the planting season and greenhouses as well. As mentioned we are working with PHAC and ESDC and others on temporary foreign workers issue and in addition to that as I've mentioned there are other options and other considerations being looked at for agriculture.

Operator: The next question is from Heather McPherson. Please go ahead.

Heather McPherson: I'm the MP for Edmonton Strathcona. I have a lot of questions but the question I'd like to ask is around the EI system. What we're hearing from people who are going onto the system right now is the system is either crashing or they can't get through.

There's no phone lines that are working. We know they've closed the in person offices which is great for safety for workers. I'm wondering if there is a plan for how we're going to get that system up and able to deal with the huge onslaught that we know is coming.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you so much. I'll pass that question to our colleagues at ESDC.

ESDC: Thank you for the question. As you can imagine we're dealing with some unprecedented volumes with the EI system. I'm not sure if it was designed to handle such volumes. Thus far it's been holding up well. We recognize that there are delays. The number of measures we've announced as well are hopefully will encourage employers to retain their workers so they don't go on EI.

That's part of the benefit of the new CERB benefit that was recently announced. We're looking at mitigation strategies. So far the system although slower is still holding up well as well as making sure we have employees available to process the claims as well.

Operator: The next question is from Marc Dalton. Please go ahead.

Marc Dalton: Marc Dalton, Pitt Meadows Maple Ridge. Will university students that are not laid off but unable to get summer jobs be eligible for CERB? Secondly what if they or anyone else earned their income abroad as far as the

\$5,000? Finally more towards Global Affairs can we have an update on Peru, the next flights? Is the code sharing issue resolved?

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much. I'm going to turn to my colleagues first at ESDC and we'll see if our colleagues at CRA have anything else to add. Then I will see if our Global Affairs colleague has joined us. They weren't on the call at the beginning.

ESDC: So long as the students had income of at least \$5,000 in 2019 or in the past 12 months prior to the date of application they would still be eligible.

Hopefully they had some experience the previous summer that would count towards that \$5,000 threshold. It would need to be money they earned in Canada. This file is evolving quickly. We hope to have some better lines of communication out around such questions as this in the near term.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much. Is there anything our CRA colleagues would like to add to that?

CRA: I think that reflects the parameters of the program.

Rhonda Crock: Can I check to see if Heather has joined us from Global Affairs Canada?

Heather Jeffrey: I'm here, sorry for joining this right at the beginning of the call and not announcing myself. For Peru we've completed now as of about an hour ago our third flight. There are about 1,200 Canadians including 300 from Cusco who are now repatriated or in the air on their way back to Canada.

We have three more flights in chain so Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday of next week which will be another 1,200 Canadians on those flights and we're working to continue to move people internally within Peru. The coding issue this is an Air Canada system so what we do is we have a prioritization for the most vulnerable.

These are people that have specific medical conditions, unaccompanied minors, others that have specific vulnerabilities that are prioritized by the embassy and the remaining flights are open commercially. It's not possible to have unfortunately a code for each individual person but we are making best efforts within the system to accommodate people.

The issue has been simply the very large volume of Canadians that all want to come back at the same time so we're confident with the additional three flights that we are putting on that we'll be able to repatriate everyone. We're hopeful that will address some of the issues for demand in terms of the codes.

Operator:
The floor is yours.

Alexandre Boulerice: Just a clarification. I wasn't sure. Is there a flight planned for next week to India to repatriate the Canadians who are stuck there? I also had a question about the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. We are hearing more and more about cases where people who were on contract.

They were translators and they could get 60% to 80% of their income from that contract work and they maybe had another part-time job at a grocery store, for example.

Those jobs are maintained. So they don't have zero income. They still have an income but one that is not sufficient to be able to pay the rent and groceries but they aren't eligible for the emergency benefit either. What happens to these people who are in this rather unique situation? There are more than we think and yes my clarification on whether there is a flight planned to India.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you for the question. First, Heather do you have a reply?

Heather Jeffrey: For India we're working very hard in negotiations with the Indian government. As you know Air Canada normally flies to India as a hub but they will not be undertaking any more flights. We are working with other carriers and the Indian government.

We hope very soon to be in a position to confirm additional flights but those negotiations are still in progress given it's the Indian government that has completely closed its air space. Everything is under discussion but we are working very hard on this as a matter of priority. We're well aware there are many Canadians seeking to depart. You can be sure that's the top of our agenda and we're continuing to work on it. We hope to have something to announce soon.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you Heather and for the second question, Chris?

ESDC: Thank you for the question. Yes. It's not – we tried to create a benefit that everyone could use under this program. Unfortunately, there may be people who can't access that program but we tried to create a benefit that didn't require a lot of things to qualify for. But we might have other programs in the future.

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

Paul Manly: I'm the Member for Nanaimo Ladysmith. Just a couple of things. One I've got a constituent who's working for a company that's mass

producing N95 masks right now and selling them into the US but he's trying to find where he can contact the Canadian government for purchasers here.

If you can provide me with that information, that would be great. I have a question about municipalities. They're being asked to defer taxes both by small businesses and by homeowners. Businesses are asking for not just to defer property tax but deferrals for things like city infrastructure costs like water, waste water and garbage costs, those fees that come up.

A lot of businesses have shut down in my community so I'm wondering if there's a package for municipalities or if they're able to do something with the gas tax to divert funds from the gas tax or if there's going to be an influx of money for them.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the question. I'll direct your first question to our partners at Innovation Science and Economic Development Canada and then we'll pass the floor to our partners at Canada Revenue Agency.

ISED: With regards to offers PSPC has set up on their website the buyandsell.gc.ca website they have a link to allow companies who wish to sell into the Covid 19 response package to share their information, what they produce and what they're prepared to offer.

There is through buyandsell.gc.ca that link. Companies who are manufacturers and wish to offer their support can go through the Innovation, Science and Economic Development website as well where the department through the Minister made a call to arms for manufacturers to provide support. That's available on the ISED website at ic.gc.ca.

CRA: With respect to municipal taxes the Canada Revenue Agency doesn't administer municipal taxes and I'm not aware of specific program that is targeting municipalities with financial support at the moment.

Operator: The next question is from Ken Hardie. Please go ahead.

Ken Hardie: Thank you very much. I had an inquiry from somebody that works at the TSX Venture Exchange. That's not the Trans Mountain pipeline by the way. It's the venture exchange in Vancouver. He's concerned there's inequitable support for privately held businesses that are eligible for the support the government has announced but publicly held companies are not. I'm wondering if somebody can clarify this.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much for the question. I'll ask our colleagues at ESDC to reply please.

ESDC: I'm not sure I can reply to that. We are looking at not for profit sector with the suite of programs that we deliver but ultimately for the programs we've been delivering it's primarily about helping workers or those facing unemployment.

Ken Hardie: Okay but of course what we're dealing with now is the for instance the wage subsidies etc. and the belief anyway, the perception is the benefits will go to privately held companies but companies that are listed on stock exchanges, that have shareholders they won't be eligible to access the same benefits as the privately held companies. I'm wondering if somebody can take this back and develop an answer.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for your question. We've taken note of that request. Thank you very much. Patrick, the next question please.

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

Carol Hughes: Thank you very much. I'm sure it hasn't been easy for everybody there. My questions are basically with respect to EI. Similar to what Alexandre Boulerice has indicated is that we do have pensioners who have a second, a job because they still have to pay their mortgage. They still have car payments and stuff like that.

They find themselves without work and so the thing is can they access the \$2,000? I know some of them might be able to access the employment insurance but again it would be so much easier for them to access the \$2,000. If they have to go on employment insurance can it be that the one week waiting period be removed completely as well so as not to tax them more than what they're already taxed financially.

The other one was with respect to extensions for people who are on employment insurance and it's about to expire. Will that be extended? The only other question I had was with respect to not for profit organizations, whether or not they're able to access the business initiatives put forward today.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for those questions. I'm going to turn first to our colleagues at ESDC and I'll follow up if there are any other comments from our colleagues at CRA.

ESDC: I'll try to answer the first question. The way the Emergency Response Benefit is designed is people have to be without employment or self-employment for at least 14 consecutive days in a 14 week period and it has to be related to Covid 19.

We try to keep the threshold low so most people could benefit from this. If your EI claims were to cease or run out you could still apply for the benefit assuming you still met the criteria, the \$5,000, that you're 15 years of age and you're unable to work due to Covid 19.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much. Do our colleagues at CRA have anything to add?

CRA: Not at this time.

Operator: The next question is from James Cumming.

James Cumming: James Cumming, Edmonton Centre. I'm wondering if and this probably fits over a few departments those people that have been traveling and particularly snowbirds that have been in the US and are very close or potentially might exceed their six month requirement as it relates to residency, healthcare, all the things that fall into that package.

Has there been any discussion about an extension or negotiation for an extension of that period given that some of them don't feel safe to travel back to Canada or in some cases cannot travel.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for that question. I think we're all positing who is best to answer that. You appropriately thought it might cross a few people. I'm going to open up the line to see if any of my colleagues have anything to add to be able to respond to that question.

If not I'm going to say you have an excellent question. We've noted it. I apologize we're unable to give you a reply on that but it's a great question you've raised. Patrick, the next question please.

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

Laurel Collins: My question is about the CERB. For people who do qualify in terms of making over \$5,000 in the previous year and who are on disability assistance, they've been working. They can in BC work up to – earn up to \$1,000 a month without getting it clawed back but now that employment, that \$1,000 a month they had they can no longer work because of Covid 19.

I'm curious since they are still going to be receiving a very small amount of disability assistance, not enough to live on without the \$1,000 they were making, are they eligible?

I want to also confirm that for folks who made \$5,000 a year who might have been independent contractors aren't eligible for EI, didn't lose their work because of Covid

19, maybe lost contracts in November or something like that, but they're looking for work now. They can't find anything because of Covid 19, that they are definitely eligible.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. I'll turn it over to Chris at ESDC.

ESDC: Thanks for the question. The criteria for this is pretty low. If people were contractors so long as they made \$5,000 and I'm really sorry, I forgot the first question, if you could remind me.

Operator: One moment please.

Laurel Collins: (Off microphone) who were on disability assistance who were working. They made \$1,000 a month plus the disability benefit that they get but now they've lost their employment and can't live without that \$1,000 they were making but they're still receiving a small amount of disability assistance whether they would be – I guess it's an overall question. Is the \$2,000 when people have no income at all? If someone has lost half of their employment as a contract worker are they eligible for a portion of that \$2,000?

ESDC: Thank you for the reminder. It is – you have to be without employment or self-employment for 14 consecutive days in a four week period as related to Covid 19. There's lots of questions on this. It is a very moving fluid topic. I can't answer for sure around the disability. I would have a hard time imagining that anybody would be penalized for that given the circumstances. It's one I'll take back and look at and make sure it's addressed.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. Patrick, thanks for opening the line to allow a repeat of the question. I know we've reached the 5:00 o'clock mark but I think we'll allow a few more questions. Patrick, over to you.

Operator: The next question is from Tamara Jansen, please go ahead.

Tamara Jansen: It's Tamara Jansen Cloverdale Langley City. Quickly hoping I'm going to get a response to my agri stability question from yesterday. I don't get anybody saying they're going to make that into an emergency thing for those seasonal growers throwing stuff out.

What I need to know is about the Nepal situation. I understand Nepal has closed their flights until March 31st. I want to know if the Canadian government made arrangements with Air Canada and negotiated with the Nepali authorities to get Canadians out of Nepal. I have a group of 60. One of them is my constituent.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for that. I'm going to go first to our partners at Global Affairs Canada. Then I will check in with our Agriculture and

Agri-food Canada folks to see if they have any comments on the agri stability question you raised. Heather, over to you.

Heather Jeffery: Indeed we are tracking the Canadians in Nepal. Our hope is that this will be part of the arrangements we're making along with Canadians in India to consolidate those travelers. They would be part of the repatriation effort. They're very much on our radar screen and part of our planning. We don't have a date to confirm yet but be assured they are on our radar and at the top of our planning list.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. Steve, I wonder if you have any comments on the agri stability question.

Agriculture: Nothing to add at this point other than to reiterate we do understand the current systems and programs. We have means we need to look at some other options given the unique circumstances that we find ourselves in now and that's underway.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks Steve. Patrick, next question please.

Operator: The next question is from Dan Mazier. Please go ahead.

Dan Mazier: Good afternoon, Dan Mazier MP for Dauphin Swan River Neepawa Manitoba. I've got three questions, one for truckers crossing the border. How are they screened? We have them coming deep right into our riding bringing up corn like raw products in the elevators, primary elevators right into grocery stores the back end of them.

I wonder how they're being screened. CFIA meat inspectors we've got a processing plant in the riding and they are chronically understaffed to say the least. What we're finding in the packing plants they're actually busier than normal because of the interruptions of the supply chain.

I wonder who's looking at that and making sure there's enough staffing levels to react to the increased demand. Then the Employment Services office is closing. I've got two small towns that they've closed especially the one in Dauphin. Those offices are used especially locally by the seniors and people like that.

They are busier offices. There's lots of people that use them for access to the internet so they can apply to things. Is there any opportunity to come up with local solutions to those closings so that services can be applied or can be accessed at the local level? Who would I talk to about that, to get that access back open?

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the questions. I'll address your CFIA question regarding meat inspectors to say that we unfortunately don't have anybody on the line from CFIA but we've noted the concern you've raised. In regards to

the border and truckers I will turn it over to our colleagues at Canada Border Services Agency. Calvin, are you on the line?

Calvin Christensen: Yes I am. Good afternoon, Calvin Christensen with Canada Border Services Agency. Thanks for your question. We aren't getting a lot of truck drivers coming across the border. Our truck traffic is down to varying degrees around the country but not really a whole lot.

Like you said there are people that are coming through the border with loads and then going inland to unload. A couple of things we've noticed is that we've had a number of Canadian drivers that have identified themselves as ill when they came back over the last couple of days.

What we do is we ask some basic questions about how they're feeling, do they have trouble breathing, do they feel like they have a fever and the ones that identify that they have been we've been referring over, doing what we can to clear their load out and then having them have a discussion with a Public Health Agency of Canada quarantine officer.

In those cases where they were sick most of them had been told to head home and self-isolate. In a couple of cases they've actually been taken away by ambulance from a port of entry to medical facilities close by so we definitely are watching and are screening it. In addition to that, asking that question, we also do provide an information pamphlet about Covid 19 and what to watch for and what self-isolation means.

I have seen guidelines go out in different areas including in the postal stream recommending people – like we've sent stuff out to the trucking industry in fact talking about how to deal with CBSA officers at the border. Wear gloves when they exchange documents with us. Keep their cabs clean all the time, things like that.

There has been some recommendation or some guidance that's been given to the trucking industry to the drivers. They should carry that forward to their points of delivery as well to wear gloves and in certain cases if they're not feeling well to make sure they identify right away and pull themselves out of the stream.

That's where we're at with it and like I said we've had a lot of experience with truck drivers over the last week in particular. The commercial entries are for the most part still running very strong and because of that they are exposed when they're in different areas of the United States and potentially in Canada as well.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for that. I'll pass the question related to EI to our colleagues at ESDC.

Chris at ESDC: I don't know if anybody from Service Canada is on the line but I think it's with regard to the closure of the Service Canada sites. That is a very recent development. We are looking at different mitigation strategies recognizing the

core service they provide in communities, especially small communities as you mentioned. I don't have any answers today but it is an ongoing issue that we are looking at how to still deliver some of these services that people depend on.

Rhonda Crock: Thanks very much Chris. We recognize we don't have anybody on the line from Service Canada today unfortunately to further that. Patrick, we'll take a couple more. Next question please.

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

Elizabeth May: Thank you very much. I have a couple of questions. I'll try to get through them quickly. On questions about where are we on what to do about international students who are allowed to stay in Canada but don't have any ability to make income at the moment and they're not Canadian so the \$5,000 even if they had \$5,000 last year I don't think they will qualify.

On the other hand we have some students who didn't make \$5,000 last year and we've talked about this. I know you're going to try to interpret the rules flexibly but you're potentially going to need a youth category.

My suggestion would be for the international students and for people who are Canadian who may have had a part time job last summer but still not made \$5,000 they're clearly not going to be able to get into the job market this summer.

Are we looking at a different category of relief for young people and students, whether international students or those unable to find summer jobs? If I can get another one in really quickly, are we doing anything to have the banks, have the government pressure the banks to reduce mortgage rates even in this period when we've got some other relief that's applied?

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for those important questions. We don't have anybody from Finance Canada on the line today. We've taken note of your questions and I will pass the floor to our colleague at ESDC.

Chris at ESDC: Again thanks for the question. We are still looking within the parameters of the youth employment program how to best respond to supporting students during this time as well recognizing the impact that it's going to have on their summer jobs and potentially also for the potential impact to returning in the fall.

They often rely on the money earned from summer jobs to pay for their education. We have – we're working on that still within the parameters of the program and again looking at different solutions and opportunities that we could help with.

Rhonda Crock:
question please.

Thank you very much and we'll take one more

Operator:
ahead.

The next question is from Mike Lake. Please go

Hon. Mike Lake: Thank you. I'm going to switch gears from my themes I've been asking about although if someone does want to weigh in on tracking and tracing and testing a bit more elaborately that would great. I do want to continue thinking about logistics. As I've been dealing with as everybody else on the call is dealing with people that are traveling, the one thought I have is I'm dealing with a group of 13 people for example in South Africa who are trying to get home and there are no flights out there.

They happened to come across a person from the High Commission at one point in the airport as they were trying to do this and they got her card. It seems kind of haphazard. I'm wondering if there could be an approach that gives all of our constituents a lead case person as it relates to those people that are out of the country, a single point of contact that is looking out for them and they know they can contact for updates, take a lot of pressure off of our offices.

That would be one thing logistically. The second thing, yesterday I took the opportunity to call the 1 833 784-4397 line, I guess Canada's coronavirus information line and it's open from 7:00 to midnight. I didn't even know it existed until yesterday, made a phone call and sat and listened to the message.

Thinking about inefficiencies, they ask you one for English, two for French and then proceed to run through a few minutes of messages that alternate in English and French. Certainly we could be more efficient than that. Finally at the end of the recorded message they mention if you are in urgent need call 911. I feel that should be at the front end of the call.

The number itself seems like a great model. It seems like for all of our completely stretched staff, constituency office staff, if we could direct constituents, direct Canadians to one single point of contact like that where everybody that answers that phone is an expert on where to send them from that point on, I think that would make our entire system more efficient.

The question that would come out of that is, is there some thought, is there something that exists, a Canadian Covid operations centre, sort of a war room of sorts where it is entirely focused on the logistics behind this effort and that centralized point that everybody that's dealing with this across the country can benefit from.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much for the questions. I'm going to start with a quick update because you're allowing me to so with your question about the

testing. I don't have a great deal more to tell you but I did want to share that we are in the process of doing some validation testing on a potential point of care test.

I had mentioned yesterday that a point of care test will be a bit of a game changer for ensuring accessibility to testing and speeding up the time with which people get tested and then get their results. We are in the process of validating one and hopefully we'll be able to get one on the Canadian market as quickly as possible.

In terms of a single point of contact I think we've noted that comment and your experience with that particular line. There is a war room if you will that is run out of our Public Safety group within the federal government. I'm not sure it's exactly what you were talking about which is more about logistics and coordination of communication with Canadians.

But I will turn to my colleagues at Public Safety to see if they may want to provide some information on that. I will then turn to my colleagues at Global Affairs Canada in regards to your earlier question. Public Safety, are you on the line? Is Craig with us?

So I am not turning to Craig but I will note there is a government operations centre that is activated and that serves as the central point in which all of the government departments are working through with our various Covid responses. Hopefully if we have Public Safety on the line for the next call they may be able to address that. For your question regarding travelers I will turn to Heather again at Global Affairs Canada.

Heather Jeffrey: Hi. We do have as you know the 24 hour watch and response centre. It's a single toll free all line. It's also available by email at sos@international.gc.ca. I would point people in general to all the contact numbers including for our embassies in specific countries like South Africa which are on the website at travel.gc.ca.

In an ideal world we would have a particular person that can answer individual calls from different Canadians but we're on a 24/7 shift schedule so we have hundreds of consular officers cycling through our watch centres here every day. As with our missions overseas as well so it's not possible just to have one person that is a case manager.

But we all work from a common case management system so when they reach a consular officer and they open a file for Canadians all their information is there and the next person who receives a call from them can open that up as well and provide (inaudible).

That's the system that we're working on right now to try and provide the greatest access for the largest number of people given that we're receiving thousands and thousands of calls every day.

We take your point. We do try and do that in smaller scale disasters but in a global one where every country is responding at the same time including here at headquarters we've had to centralize it into those toll free numbers which are available both here in Canada and overseas.

Rhonda Crock: Thank you very much. With that we're going to close the call. I would like to thank everybody who joined us today. We really do appreciate the work you're doing on behalf of your constituents to raise important questions at the table. We're also very happy to have a venue where we can answer those questions to the best of our ability.

Some of our colleagues may have dropped off the line because we did go a bit over our half an hour time frame but I'm hoping this venue continues to serve its purpose which is to provide timely information to Parliamentarians and Senators on the Covid situation.

Again I want to thank my colleagues from other departments who were able to be on the line today and encourage everybody to continue to follow all the great public health guidance that's coming out and keep safe and healthy and well. Thank you very much.

Operator: Thank you. The conference has now ended. Please disconnect your lines at this time. Thank you for your participation.