

NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Trent Hills Family Health Team offers virtual appointments as services re-open.

TRENT HILLS, June 24, 2020 — The Trent Hills Family Health Team (THFHT) is pleased to announce the launch of primary care virtual appointments for patients.

When booking appointments, booking staff will ask both the patient and the THFHT clinician if the appointment should be conducted by telephone or video. If a video visit is chosen, booking staff will send a link to the patient's email address.

“As we continue to work through the COVID-19 pandemic, we are developing new and creative ways to deliver care” said NP Samantha Dalby. “COVID-19 has pushed us into re-thinking how we take care of people. A lot of the solutions make sense in a rural community like Trent Hills where our patients are spread over a large geographical area and might have difficulty getting to the clinic even when there isn't a pandemic”.

At the scheduled time of the video visit, patients simply click the link in the email to attend the visit and follow the steps to start the video session. They will be taken to a screen where they wait for the healthcare provider to join the video appointment.

In order to use video visits, patients will need to have a current email address on their clinic chart and must have a computer or mobile device with a current web browser, camera and microphone as well as reasonable internet service. Many patients will find their mobile phone is an easy way to access a video visit.

“There will be some trial and error as both providers and patients conduct their first video appointments but we expect that as we all get used to the technology this will be a great and seamless option for providing primary care” said Dr. Jamie Read, THFHT Medical Director.

Video appointments are operated through the THFHT electronic charting system already used by the team. The charting system and video visits are triple encrypted (3DES) and fully protect the privacy and confidentiality of patients.

On March 17, 2020 the Government of Ontario enacted a declaration of emergency to protect the public from the COVID-19 virus. All businesses, facilities, and public places were required to close immediately. The Trent Hills Family Health Team converted to telephone care with all providers working from home offices.

THFHT has continued to provide primary care through telephone appointments and seeing essential in-person visits in the clinics. In order to conserve provincial supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) for acute care facilities, such as hospitals and emergency departments, primary care teams have been asked to continue to provide care through phone and virtual visits whenever possible.

“It's not always possible to provide care by phone and sometimes we just have to be able to lay eyes on a patient” said Dr. Read. “But the use of video appointments could go a long way to helping with that and keeps both patients and providers safe at home. That is something we can all benefit from right now.”

THFHT have a staged plan for reopening programs and services over the coming months. This week laboratory services, palliative care home-visits, and appointments with nursing stations for essential in-person care, such as injections, have been added. Next stages will see the re-opening of chronic disease programs (e.g. Diabetes), and screening programs (e.g. cervical screening/PAP).

“It will take time to phase all the services and programs back in because we need to be safe and especially careful with our use of PPE because we have access to a very limited supply. And of course, like everyone, we need to be prepared to change service delivery or “pivot” if there is a return of COVID cases in a so-called second wave” said Dalby. “But we are all quite excited by the prospect that a post-COVID THFHT will be both new and improved”.

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The Trent Hills Family Health Team (THFHT) continues to provide essential services and the team and community partners are working very hard to promote and protect the health and well-being of our community during the COVID-19 Pandemic. For local COVID-19 updates, visit the HKPR District Health Unit web site at <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/>

THFHT patients are encouraged to contact their clinic for common illness such as colds, earaches, sore throats, urinary tract infections, low grade fevers or care of chronic conditions such as pain management, hypertension, COPD or medication renewals.

People with acute symptoms that fall outside of COVID-19 as defined by Public Health are encouraged to seek out medical support at a hospital Emergency Department. **Please do not avoid seeking care in a medical emergency.** This includes anyone with symptoms such as the following:

- Severe chest pain or pressure
- Trouble breathing
- Signs and symptoms of stroke
- Sudden confusion
- Seizures
- Heavy bleeding
- Severe pain anywhere in the body
- High fevers not better with medicine
- Laceration and suspected broken bones
- Suicidal Thoughts

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