



Calgary

University of Calgary medical students quadruple province's COVID-19 contact-tracing capacity

University of Alberta medical students will join their ranks later this week

[Lucie Edwardson](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 25, 2020 6:00 AM MT | Last Updated: 10 hours ago



A health-care worker is pictured working a COVID-19 testing site in Vancouver. University of Calgary students are playing a vital role in contacting Albertans who have come in contact with those who have tested positive. (Jonathan Hayward/Canadian Pres)

comments

University of Calgary medical students and residents are helping fight the spread of COVID-19 on the front lines, and with their help the province has quadrupled its contact-tracing capacity.

Public Health resident Dr. Richelle Schindler has been working on the province's response to COVID-19 since January.

- **How Alberta has managed to do more COVID-19 tests than any other province**

She said in mid-March there was a surge in COVID-19 cases and it became clear that the work they'd been doing on increasing Alberta's contact-tracing capacity needed to be enacted immediately.

Medical students mobilized

"Within the first 24 hours of having those discussions we had already mobilized our first groups of medical students," she said. "Five days later we had trained 150 of them to be ready to go."

Schindler said these U of C medical students are playing a vital role in contacting Albertans who have come in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

"It means that for every case, we identify everyone they have been in contact with while they were able to spread the illness, and connect with them," she said.

"This has allowed us to identify people who were sick and get them rapid access to medical care, keep people with less serious symptoms safely at home, and help people take action to protect their friends and family from becoming ill too."

Schindler said countries that have done this thoroughly and well, including South Korea, Japan, and Singapore, have been able to slow the spread in their communities.

Resources being shared nationwide

Dr. Jasmine Pawa with Public Health Physicians of Canada (PHPC) said this is a great example of using available resources in the most appropriate ways support the system.

"I think that there's lots of learning for medical students and being a part of this and in the value of public health and public health responses to this kind of work," she said.

"I think it's important for us to always balance making the best use of our capacity with appropriate training and direction and that's something that's really happening with an example like this."

Pawa said PHPC is now sharing the resources developed in Calgary — including training materials and an overview of the process —with members throughout Canada.

"There are many places across the country looking at doing things like this," she said. "They've shared that they appreciated the resources."

Pawa said it's possible that nurses and other health-care workers could also be brought into the fold and trained to do contact tracing.

'It's excellent'

Dru Marshall, provost for the University of Calgary, said this is a good chance for students to learn, and be of good use.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for medical or nursing students to be doing that from an epidemiological understanding of disease and how disease can be transmitted rapidly in the population. I think it's excellent," she said.

"It's also of course most importantly supporting the health-care system at a time that we need it most."

Marshall said it's just one example of how the U of C is supporting the fight against COVID-19.

"We have a really interesting connection happening between social work, nursing, and medicine to provide a supportive environment for students both on our campus and in the community," she said.

"We also have some of our great researchers on the front line doing COVID-19 research and looking at policies around COVID, and some wonderful researchers helping the province map out the time course of what's happening in Alberta."

University of Alberta med students are currently being trained by Schindler and her teammates. They will join the province's response Thursday.

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