

## 24 April 2020: Letter from the Chief of the Defence Staff regarding COVID-19

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

The week began with tragic news out of Nova Scotia. Mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, the loss of so many innocent people has been felt by the entire nation. These have been difficult days, made harder by the fact that we cannot come together in person. On behalf of all of you, I send my sincerest condolences to family, friends and any of you who have been affected, including for the loss of Chief Petty Officer Bagley (retired). We will remember all those who lost their lives.

I would like to start this week's update letter by stating that although morale across the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is generally good, it is very apparent to me, and my senior leadership, that we are facing some significant stressors that need to be addressed. I will do my best to identify some of the major issues, give you my thoughts and inform you of the guidance I have given to my staff and senior leadership to help.

**Mental Wellbeing.** Use of help lines and access to mental health professionals is at an all-time low. There may be some valid reasons for this, but I would like to encourage anyone who needs to reach out or access mental health therapy to do so. Those who have been in mental health care are encouraged to re-engage. Given the stress and anxiety associated with current circumstances, and to help avoid a bow wave of mental health support in the future, the Surgeon General has asked that I convey his own encouragement to those who need or want to access care. You can access the CAF Member Assistance Program (CFMAP) 1-800-268-7708, or contact your local Wing or Base Medical Clinic or Chaplain.

**Physical Wellbeing.** Our clinics are open and you can call to make a telemedicine appointment or arrange to visit your clinic through the CAF Medical Clinic nearest to you.

**Postings.** Our intent is to proceed with a limited posting season. It has clearly been delayed, and will be made more challenging by COVID-19 related travel restrictions, uncertainty in the real-estate market, availability of commercial interim lodgings and meals and safety. For many, you will be informed if your posting is cancelled or delayed by a year. For those being posted this year, you will be kept informed of when and how to conduct your move. Moves will need to be conducted with COVID precautions built in to protect you and your family and, importantly, those that you would come into contact with during the move process. It is important that you keep your chain of command informed as to any factors that would reasonably prevent you from being able to conduct a move this Active Posting Season (APS). Postings for many will be severely delayed as we have extended the APS to the end of December, 2020. Move dates, particularly for those with children going to a new school, will be made as flexible as possible, where circumstances permit. If you have any questions the Administrative

Response Centre (ARC) team is available to both the chain of command and individuals to get advice. Although your chain of command should be your first stop, you can contact the ARC directly at 1-833-445-1182 or by email at [CMPARC.CRACPM@forces.gc.ca](mailto:CMPARC.CRACPM@forces.gc.ca). Further details are also available in CANFORGEN 049/20 available on the CAF App.

**Promotions.** Promotions that come with postings to assume new duties will continue as planned, and all promotions, regardless whether the new duties are assumed or not will be honoured by the end of the year. This may leave us with many positions over-ranked beginning January 2021, but this situation will be resolved during the 2021 APS.

**Courses.** While critical force generation training continues, our entire individual and collective training system is at a standstill to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We did this to protect you, your families and the communities where we train. We are looking at a range of options and methods to re-start our training system. I have asked my staff to develop options that would work even if COVID-19 is still a threat. This work will take some time to plan and, if deemed feasible, take considerable effort to execute safely and properly. Some incremental steps to re-start recruit and DP1 training, as well as Reserve summer individual training, may occur as early as June, and I hope to be able to re-start most training at close-to-normal levels this Fall. That said, it is all conditions based, and I will keep you informed. If you need a career course, you will get it, but it will likely be delayed and may be delivered very differently. Your continued development in your chosen field is important to you and as it is to the CAF – we'll get there.

**Back to work.** My intent is to get us back to work, as close to 'normal' as possible when it is safe to do so, or when we can make it safe for all in the Defence team. There are many things we must consider. We will retain the current dispersed posture for the time being, until we better understand the local environment in which we operate. Returning to normalcy will be a long and deliberate operation and will be different across the country as the conditions vary from region to region. I want to make it clear, however, that with family care plans hugely disrupted, schools closed and summer camps in question, and our overriding concern for your health and the health and safety of your families, we accept that some of you may not be able to return to work as quickly or as easily as others – even though you want to. This will not be seen as a poor reflection of your dedication or professionalism. Short of an armed attack on Canada, or an armed conflict overseas demanding a rapid response, we will, at all levels, take individual and family circumstances into account as we resume our normal posture and give you the freedom you need to make good family decisions. We have reacted to COVID-19 by taking early precautions and carefully preparing forces for operations, with you as individuals and families taking necessary precautions. I am confident we can respond to the current and forecasted needs of Canada for anticipated domestic and known deployed operations with the healthy forces currently available. Going back to a normal 'at work' routine will be planned, phased and carefully executed when we can, and within the obvious limitations that we are all living with.

**Deployed members.** Expeditionary operations and OUTCAN positions have felt the impact of COVID-19 as well as some significant geo-political changes in our mission areas. Anxiety based on concern for families back home, rotation plans, operational demands, potential for exposure to COVID-19 while deployed, and a range of other concerns has added significantly to the stress on our people deployed or away from Canada. We hear you loud and clear and stand ready to assist, particularly if your family needs assistance. While the quarantine protocols for people coming into Canada are in effect, returning troops will be isolated in Trenton, or elsewhere, for a fourteen-day period to ensure you are COVID free and pose no risk to families or your communities. Sailors will conduct their isolation during a 14-day passage at sea. I do not want returning troops to feel as though they are under any suspicion of carrying COVID into in their communities. By strictly adhering to the isolation period, even though it delays your reunion with your loved ones and friends, you will be considered a responsible person as the country fights the COVID-19 spread.

**Imposed Restriction (IR).** If you are on IR and not needed for daily attendance 'at work' or are not needed for immediate operational recall, you should have gone home to your family. If you are in a position where you are usually at work in person day-to-day, but you are not on operations or assembling for operations, you can, conditions permitting, apply for and receive permission to go home for one week every two months to ensure your family is ok. This will not be considered leave it will be considered duty travel, and will not count against your annual leave. If we need to, we will find a way to assist you in getting home. You will need to take extra precautions to avoid the spread of the virus, and you may be subject to regional protocols such as a 14-day quarantine, but you must see your families.

**Operations.** All routine domestic and international named operations continue, although force posture and profile has been adjusted to account for COVID-19. Theatre mission specific training (TMST) will be modified, but will occur to ensure you are prepared for these operations. International named operations and OUTCAN duties will experience changes as the world grapples with COVID-19 and those adversaries who would seek to take advantage change the operating environment. We remain vigilant to detect such change, and we must be ready to respond if things go pear shaped. We are concerned about changing dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and what it might mean for future deployments in the region. We are determined to ensure we do our part to meet Canadian deterrence and assurance objectives in Europe, and I think we are all concerned about the way ahead in the Middle East. COVID-19 and food security issues will add to the host of issues facing Africa and our small missions there. And, the defence of North America remains a constant mission with ever evolving threats. Should any member of the CAF think that COVID-19 threatens your job in your chosen profession, think again, we have never been needed more.

**Training.** Training resumption will be conditions based, carefully planned to preserve health and safety, and re-started incrementally. From individual to collective training, in

accordance with proficiency and professional standards, we will get back to it, but we'll be smart about it.

**How the CAF can help Canada.** We are doing a lot right now. Main effort is don't become part of the problem. While taking care of the main effort, we have responded to numerous Requests for Assistance (RFA) and our folks are doing incredible work. We are also ready, with a large and highly skilled force to help with natural disasters or additional response to COVID-19 related RFA's. Medical personnel and supporters in Quebec and Ontario helping in Long Term Care facilities are facing the epicentre of the crisis – we owe them all our love and respect.

**Uncertainty.** It is clear to me that you are restless and wanting to get 'back at it' while also feeling some uncertainty about the future. From uncertainty about spousal employment, postings, career courses, promotions and even job security to future operational rotations and tasks in Canada – there is lots to be concerned about. If travel is required, we will look at every option to facilitate movement including the possibility of service flights to help those who have to travel long distances. Some things are within our power to control and some are not. We can stay healthy and safe... just follow the rules. Postings, career courses and promotions will all happen, eventually. Your jobs are secure, you are much valued by Canadians and respected by your leadership. Operations will pick up again in time and we may get very busy here in Canada. The thing that we can be certain about - while staying healthy, staying connected to your leaders and colleagues, and remembering how important you are to the long-term defence and security of Canada and our allies - is that we can never fail, and we won't.

I would like to end with some shout outs to some of your comrades in arms and civilian staff who are pretty busy. To our strategic and tactical airlift squadrons, to our cyber defence, signallers and network specialists, to the staff at our Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC), to our chaplains, our CAF healthcare personnel, cooks, supply technicians, vehicle technicians and clerks – thank you. It shouldn't have to take a crisis...but sometimes it does. To those helping develop policy and move procurement for the next bound – you are unsung heroes and the future depends on you. To our DM and her team of incredible staff who affect all we do – you are fire-team partners in every respect and we couldn't do it without you.

Sincerely,

J.H. Vance  
General