

1 May 2020: Update from Deputy Minister Jody Thomas

Team,

This week, we lost six Defence Team members. Our thoughts are with the families, friends and HMCS Fredericton shipmates of our Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) colleagues involved in this terrible accident:

Captain Brenden MacDonald, Pilot, originally from New Glasgow, NS

Captain Kevin Hagen, Pilot, originally from Nanaimo, BC

Captain Maxime Miron-Morin, Air Combat Systems Officer, originally from Trois-Rivières, QC

Master Corporal Matthew Cousins, Airborne Electronic Sensor Operator, originally Guelph, Ontario

Sub-Lieutenant Matthew Pyke, Naval Warfare Officer, originally from Truro, Nova Scotia

Sub-Lieutenant Abbigail Cowbrough, Marine Systems Engineering Officer, originally from Toronto, ON

Just as we are part of the team that protects Canadians and defends our country, we are also part of the family that grieves together in the face of terrible loss. We all feel this loss profoundly.

Our Defence Team colleagues in the CAF take on great risk when they put on their uniform each day. As DND civilians, we intellectually understand the risk, but there are some times when the reality of our CAF colleagues' commitment to Canada and Canadians is reflected in the starkest of terms.

We're all grappling with recent events and our current circumstances. The year to date has been relentless in so many ways. We are sad, many of us feel angry and all of us feel tired. Certainty is in short supply, and uncertainty only adds to the intensity of the stress we are all feeling right now. I hope bringing some clarity to the next month will help in a small way.

- 1. Most DND employees will continue working from home until at least 31 May, probably later into June.**

Your L1s will continue to determine which of you should be on-site, working from home, or keeping safe at home. Please remember that your actions are very important to the overall health and functionality of our Defence Team. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact your manager.

2. Our eventual return to work will be gradual, in-line with relevant provincial guidelines, and dependent on local circumstances.

Provincial decisions will be pertinent to Defence Team decision timelines for returning to work. We already see differences province to province and are monitoring the evolving situation carefully. Please keep close contact with your manager. We're grateful for your continued flexibility.

3. One size will definitely *not* fit all when return-to-work starts.

Some elements of the CAF will return to work sooner than others. General Vance and I have instructed our L1s to work closely with their managers and the Gender Based Analysis Plus team within Corporate Secretariat. We want to ensure we can meet business needs, while respecting the ongoing challenges that different groups of Defence Team staff may face due to COVID-19-related closures. All plans will be consulted with Bargaining Agents, and will give clear expectations around Personal Protective Equipment and physical distancing.

4. Modernizing our collaborative tools with Microsoft Office 365.

Keeping connected right now is important for both mental health and business continuity. While there are free and popular commercial options in wide distribution, we felt it was important that Defence Team members have a secure, supported capability they could work from with confidence.

ADM (IM) has done a huge amount of work deploying Microsoft Office 365 and Teams across the Defence Team. The suite is cloud-based, collaborative and the products are tested and well-established across Government. This work, combined with a substantial boost to our network's bandwidth, has increased the Defence Team's capacity [to perform remote work](#) ten-fold.

5. Inconsistent application of rules during Pandemic period.

Our union partners have shared with us that some employees are concerned about the way in which "699 leave" and other pandemic-specific guidance is being applied. While we're following overarching guidance from the Office of Chief Human Resources Officer and Treasury Board Secretariat, we know it can be confusing for managers striving to apply rules consistently yet equitably in these entirely new circumstances. HR-CIV is always available—whether you're an employee or a manager—if you have questions about how to interpret a situation or apply a guideline. Please contact HR-CIV via HR CONNECT RH for questions or concerns, or consult the HR GO RH app for information. If you feel you still want to escalate your situation, HR-CIV can advise you on that as well.

6. Next week's Mental Health Week is especially timely.

Mental Health week starts on Monday and ADM (PA) and ADM (HR-CIV) are working on a rollout of virtual events and social media engagement activities. I hope you'll tune-in and use the week as an opportunity to reflect on where you're at and how you and your family are coping. [We have services to support you](#) during this incredibly stressful time. See what's right for you.

If you have not already, please bookmark the public-facing **Defence Team COVID-19 website**. It contains all CAF, DND and relevant Government of Canada messages for employees, and contains direct links to both CAF and DND Twitter feeds. It's a useful tool, as is the HR GO RH app, and the Canadian Armed Forces App.

Depending on where you are and what you're doing, it can be difficult to feel grounded in reality. Here's what helps me in all this, though: Even before COVID-19 and other significant challenges we have faced in 2020, each of us was rooted in a deeply meaningful larger purpose: service to Canada. Right now, Canadians across this country are desperate for hope. And you—all of you—are part of delivering that hope to them. Your efforts are a gift to your country during a challenging time.

Thank you for all you do.

Jody Thomas
Deputy Minister of National Defence
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