

May 8 2020: Letter from the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

At CFB Trenton this week, we performed the solemn duty of receiving our Fallen from overseas. To those who worked tirelessly to provide such a dignified repatriation ceremony, and to those along the “virtual Highway of Heroes” who honoured online their fallen fellow Canadians, you have my sincerest thanks.

I also wish to express my admiration to the Captain and crew of HMCS *Fredericton* for their professionalism and courage under the most trying of circumstances.

The flight safety investigation team, comprised of seven personnel, has started its independent investigation to determine the facts surrounding the crash of Call Sign *Stalker 22*. The next step of these efforts will be a detailed underwater search and recovery operation. It is our intent to ensure that the families, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian public are provided with a factual account of the events that occurred in as timely a manner as possible. We must now provide our flight safety team the time they need to gather the facts so that they may determine the cause of the crash.

Op LASER

Under Op LASER, Requests for Assistance (RFAs) from the provinces of Ontario and Quebec for assistance at long term care facilities have seen CAF personnel deployed to some 20 facilities in Quebec and five facilities in Ontario. To those deployed to these facilities, we are asking you to perform critical tasks that are not only saving lives, but also bringing dignity and comfort to those in their time of need. This is an unusual task for the military. It will be temporary and every effort will be made to ensure your safety and effectiveness while you work. Thank you for your positive attitude!

I wish to take this moment to recognize all the CAF and civilian nurses in honour of “National Nursing Week 2020,” to be held May 11-17, 2020. Mere words cannot properly describe how thankful we are for the tireless work and dedication you demonstrate each and every day to provide the care and attention on which Canadians depend.

Our Canadian Rangers, the eyes and ears of our Northern communities, are currently supporting approximately 30 different communities in Northern and Eastern Quebec. In Saskatchewan, Rangers are working in the communities of Wollaston Lake, Île-à-la-Crosse and Fond-du-Lac. Work includes educating people about physical distancing, supporting the work of healthcare personnel, and assisting with the delivery of personal

protective equipment. Knowledge of their local communities is invaluable and I thank all Rangers for answering the call.

This week both the Deputy Minister and I issued a joint directive DND/CAF COVID-19 Public Health Measures and Personal Protection. Our intent is clear, we seek to minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission within CAF/DND by issuing common DND/CAF policy on Public Health Measures (PHM) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The directive clearly articulates authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities. Ensure you have access to the directive through your chain of command or on the CAF App and I ask that you read it in its entirety. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/dm-cds-joint-directive.html>

Resumption of Activities

Effective immediately, CAF personnel are permitted to adjust their personal situation to match what is permitted in their respective Province or Territory. There will be differences between regions, and therefore, differences in what CAF members across the Force may do for recreation and sports activities. For those assigned to Op LASER, or any other operational function, you are required to continue to abide by my latest directions given as part of Tasking Order Op LASER 20-01 to remain home and remain ready.

The CAF will begin to resume activities based on a strategic directive to be issued shortly. The objective will be to resume our training and readiness activities while taking precautions to avoid contracting or spreading COVID-19. Much will depend on unit COs to manage and accept risk locally and understand family circumstances as the economy and society adjust. Long term plans to manage our operations and activities during the pandemic threat or with lessons learned from COVID-19 will also be addressed over time.

NDWCC Emergency Charity Campaign

In response to economic hardship from COVID-19 shared by many Canadians, the National Defence COVID-19 Emergency Charity Campaign has been launched. If you are in a position to give, please do so. The following link will help you to easily access the means to give online.

Mental Health Week

As we close out Mental Health Week I want to add my voice to remind everyone that help is always available every day of the year and to encourage those who need help to seek it out through the Employee Assistance Program, Member Assistance Program, or the nearest crisis / distress centre. You can visit the following webpage to access a

variety of resources and information to help maintain and improve upon your mental health and overall well-being.

Happy Mother's Day!

I close with a Thank You to all the mothers and those who love with a mother's heart on this Mother's Day, May 10, 2020. For all you do, we love you and we thank you.

Sincerely,

J.H. Vance

General