



# COMMUNICATION UPDATE

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members City Council
<b>DATE:</b>	November 4, 2021
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Ambulance Offload Delays (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Grace Mater General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

The Hamilton Paramedic Service is experiencing significant increases in ambulance offload delay at hospital which, in combination with increased service demands, is creating extended periods where there are few or no ambulances available for response in the City.

This update was provided on November 2, 2021 via email on the continuing challenges created by hospital offload delays, and to advise Council of the actions the Hamilton Paramedic Service is taking to mitigate them.

The Hamilton Paramedic Chief provided Council with an update in late July 2021 advising that despite the reductions in hospital offload delays in 2020 and early 2021, we were experiencing an increase in offload delays as hospitals resumed more regular activities.

At the start of July 2021, we began experiencing increased frequency and duration of offload delays, which directly resulted in decreased ambulance resource availability. These increases in offload delays have continued throughout the duration of the fourth wave and remain a significant operational challenge. Since my last update, the ambulance time consumed at hospitals beyond the first 30 minutes averaged 108 hours per day, and as high as 186 hours in a single 24-hour period. This is an increase of 90% in hours lost due to offload delay compared to 2020. During this same three-month period (August – October), there were only four days with lower lost time than the 2020 average and 56% of the days saw more than 100 hours lost. We have also experienced delays in transfer of care of as long as 12 hours for an individual patient.

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Over the last three months, offload delays combined with continued call demand increases (trending around 10% above the pre-pandemic norm), we have experienced very frequent periods where four or less ambulances have been available to respond in the city, including 41 Code Zero events. In comparison, the Code Zero events during the same time period (August – October) over the last three years:

- In 2020 - four Code Zero events;
- In 2019 (pre-pandemic) - 13 Code Zero events; and
- In 2018 - 20 Code Zero events.

Response time performance for life-threatening emergency calls has also lengthened by more than one minute during the last three months. There have been delayed responses to calls dispatched by the Ministry of Health as life threatening, and non-critical calls have seen much more significant delays with some non-critical calls being delayed for several hours.

While we have had no recent media inquiries regarding the increasing frequency of Code Zero events, there will undoubtedly be interest in this sharp increase. From an employee wellness and working condition perspective, hospital offload delays have also become a major focus for OPSEU, which represents our front-line paramedics.

On a provincial level, our situation is not unique; almost all land ambulance services are reporting similar trends and our provincial association has raised this as a significant issue with the Ministry of Health. While we continue to undertake initiatives to assist in reducing these delays, our ability to manage the issue is extremely limited given the standards of care required under provincial regulation.

To resolve this issue, we continue to engage senior hospital administration and the Ministry of Health at the Assistant Deputy Minister level. The primary challenge for hospitals is a higher number of patients arriving at the Emergency Department for care, as well as patient flow issues based on hospital space, staffing capacity, infection control issues and patient acuity. Hospital staff have committed to refocussing their attention to this issue and have acknowledged the impact on our essential community service.

While we will continue to monitor the situation and actively engage both the hospitals and the Ministry of Health on more permanent solutions, the outlook for the immediate future does not appear to provide a positive resolution to offload delay issues.

Should you require further information, please contact Chief Michael Sanderson at ext. 7741 or at [michael.sanderson@hamilton.ca](mailto:michael.sanderson@hamilton.ca).

## **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

None