

Service interruptions – FAQ's

Service Interruptions

Service interruptions occur when Interior Health (IH) faces unforeseen or unavoidable disruptions in its ability to provide or offer certain services (e.g. emergency department, lab, or diagnostic imaging). They can occur from time to time and the reasons why they occur can vary. In some cases, service interruptions require that patients be sent to other facilities for emergency needs, or that we close certain departments for a temporary period.

Service interruptions are temporary and necessary for patient safety. We appreciate your patience as we work to provide you with the care you need, when you need it.

What are examples of service interruptions?

Examples of service interruptions include an emergency department needing to temporarily redirect patients to another facility (sometimes referred to as a 'diversion'), or changes to a laboratory, medical imaging department or medical clinic's hours of operation.

Why is a service interruption occurring?

While service interruptions can be due to ongoing shortages of skilled staff across the health sector, they can also have other causes; from power outages to unexpected or unavoidable staff absences, to supply chain issues, to (especially in the case of emergency departments) a sudden increase in patients with emergency care needs that temporarily puts a facility and its staff at maximum capacity.

Service interruptions occur as a last resort when all avenues for safe staffing (physicians or nursing) are exhausted. We will continue to do everything we can to prevent service interruptions, but there are times when they cannot be avoided.

What is Interior Health doing to reduce the frequency of service interruptions?

IH works proactively to fill vacant positions right up until the shift is scheduled to start. Scheduling is completed several weeks or months in advance. In instances where community staff or our medical administration cannot initially fill all shifts, we immediately look to find coverage to fill those gaps. The majority of gaps are filled, effectively preventing the need for most closures.

IH continues to explore and implement new measures to stabilize emergency department services across the Interior region. In each situation, we consider all available options, including:

- Determining if overtime, vacation callbacks or shift extensions are options (in accordance with collective agreements we have with unionized staff);
- Voluntary redeployments from other sites, positions or departments; and

- Bringing in external nursing and locum physicians.

IH has short, medium and long-term strategies underway to stabilize staffing levels across the Interior region and we are actively recruiting for new physicians and staff.

Where can I access emergency services during a service interruption?

People in the community who need life-threatening emergency care (i.e., chest pains, difficulty breathing, severe bleeding) should always call 9-1-1 for transport to the nearest available and appropriate facility.

How can I find out about service interruptions?

All service interruptions are shared with local media.

To receive notifications about service interruptions directly to your email inbox, [Click Here](#) and select the “News & Alerts” checkbox to subscribe to IH updates.

Information on the closest facility will be included on Interior Health’s website on the [Media Centre & Alerts page](#). You can also find the most up-to-date information on our social media channels ([Facebook](#) and [X](#)).

Can I see a doctor virtually instead of travelling to a different community?

While our priority is to have services available in the community, there are virtual options available to all BC residents.

In less urgent cases, it is important to connect with a care provider. Patients with a family physician can contact their office for advice, or access virtual care.

[HealthLink BC](#) virtual physicians are available to 8-1-1 callers after assessment by one of our registered nurses. If the nurse determines that further medical assessment by a doctor would help you get the best advice on when and where you should seek care, they may refer you to your family doctor or nurse practitioner, a health provider in your community, or one of our virtual physicians.

Anyone unsure whether an emergency room visit is warranted can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or visit [HealthLinkBC.ca](#).

TELUS Health MyCare is accessed using the Telus MyCare app. Residents can book an appointment through the [TELUS Health MyCare app](#). Based on the time and date chosen, a patient will be matched with an available doctor. These doctor visits are covered by the provincial health plan.

Tia Health is available by visiting [www.tiahealth.com](#). Tia Health offers online doctor appointments with a network of family doctors, specialists, dietitians, naturopaths, counsellors, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists and more. Appointments are free with a valid BC health card.

Other online options available for free with a BC MSP card include Virtualclinic+ at www.virtualclinics.ca Walk-in Virtual Clinic at www.walkinvirtualclinics.com and Vivacare available at www.vivacare.ca.

First Nations people and their families can also access [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#). To book an appointment, please call 1-855-344-3800.

If I have to go to another hospital for care, how do I get home?

If you are transferred to another hospital, the [Health Connections](#) bus may be an option. This service is for non-emergency, independent patients, such as those going to specialists or diagnostic appointments, but patients can also access it to return home from another hospital.

The cost is \$5 per trip. Medical passengers are prioritized for accessing this service. To book a trip, patients can call 1-855-359-3935 two business days in advance.

Please discuss travel prior to your discharge with a nurse or social worker, who can help with other travel supports or options.