

COVID-19: Recommendations of the Medical Imaging Committee

(The following information is provided courtesy of the Association des Radiologistes du Québec)

Today we are sending you recommendations discussed at the COVID-19 Imaging Committee at the MSSS. The spirit of these measures is to reduce patient flow to imaging departments and medical imaging laboratories in an organized, structured manner in order to limit patient exposure. This being said, exam cancellations must be done in a way that allows us to find the right balance to avoid a backlog of patients being under-investigated if we cancel exams too aggressively. The crisis may be long. As you know, there are many standards in radiology and it is risky for the ARQ to draw up an exhaustive list of the exams that should or should not be performed in the context of selective cancellations because your practice profiles are extremely varied. That is why we are appealing to your clinical judgment to determine, as a team, which exams you consider relevant to undertake and which you will eliminate.

Here are **four recommendations** resulting from the work of the **COVID-19 IMAGING Clinical Task Force** that are meant for both public sector institutions and medical imaging laboratories.

Relevance of Medical Imaging

Medical imaging **should not be used for screening patients**, but rather, should be used to **evaluate the severity** of and **monitor the complications** in COVID-19 patients. The methods most frequently indicated for COVID-19 patients are the chest X-ray and the thorax CT scan.

Any request for imaging exams other than the chest X-ray should be analyzed and validated by a radiologist or other doctor responsible for the department.

Patient Imaging

COVID-19 patients

Mobile radiography devices are preferred in order to restrict the movement of COVID-19 patients.

A process ensuring the delivery of safe services and preventing the spread of the virus should be put in place by the institution following the public health department's recommendations. Among other things, it should include:

- protective measures for the patient
- protective measures for staff members
- disinfection of the mobile device
- storage of the mobile device

When a mobile device cannot be used, take into consideration the air change rate in the room where the exam is performed. It will be necessary to close the room for a certain amount of time after examining a COVID-19 patient, in

- **Patients without positive COVID-19 tests, but with risk factors or questionable symptoms**

For patients:

- with symptoms resembling those of COVID-19, or
- who have returned from a trip in the last 14 days, whether they present symptoms or not, or
- who have been in contact with a person with COVID-19

The examination request should be analyzed and validated by a radiologist.

Any non-urgent exam whose postponement would not cause any harm to patients should be put off to a later date.

The postponement of the exam shall be the responsibility of the institution where the patient was supposed to receive the service.

addition to the other prevention measures mentioned above.

In cases where the exam must be performed, follow the same procedures as for a COVID-19 patient.

Elective exam cancellations

Depending on the current situation and taking into consideration the potential no-show rate, a 20% elective activity cancellation level is recommended at both hospital centres and medical imaging laboratories. This 20% cancellation rate constitutes the 1st level. Other cancellation levels may be recommended in the future depending on how the situation develops.

Level 2 corresponds to a 50% elective exam cancellation rate and level 3 means that no elective exams will be performed. Only emergencies and hospitalizations will be considered. These cancellation recommendations should apply to radiology, nuclear medicine and cardiac ultrasound departments.

Each request should be evaluated, prioritizing the postponement of non-urgent exams for vulnerable patients, i.e., patients aged 70 and up, immunocompromised patients, caregivers, etc.

The triaging of requests should be performed by a committee consisting of at least one doctor and one manager, under the authority of the head of the department or service, and of the administrative coordinator.

For **exams during the cancer trajectory, refer to the following recommendations:**

- **Recommendations for breast cancer screening and investigation**

- **COVID-19 – Oncology (Quebec Breast Cancer Screening Program) recommendations**

Cancellations should be distributed evenly over the entire day in order to avoid long wait times in the waiting room and contact among patients. Time slots freed up by voluntary cancellations should not be filled.

General recommendations

Number of people accompanying patients

Institutions and medical imaging laboratories should adopt a policy restricting the number of people accompanying patients.

This policy should restrict the number and presence of people accompanying patients to only those cases that require it, for example:

- Obstetric ultrasound
- Pediatric patients
- Patients with diminishing autonomy
- Patients with mental health problems
- Etc.

Note that all people accompanying patients must undergo the same triage questionnaire about COVID-19 risk factors as the patients themselves.

Storage of personal protective equipment

Personal protective equipment for users and staff should be stored in a controlled-access location.

Access to the equipment should be authorized to a restricted number of dedicated individuals.

Reorganization of waiting rooms

Waiting rooms should be reorganized to comply with the public health department's recommendations for the minimum distance between two people:

2 metres or at least 1 metre.

Economic Measures

Financial institutions: easing of credit conditions

Several financial institutions have followed Desjardins's lead by easing credit conditions and offering relief measures, such as a moratorium on the repayment of capital and the postponement of payments for credit card products and financing. Check with your financial institution.

Flexibility on the part of certain landlords

You can check with your landlords to see about having rent payment deferred for a few months if you are experiencing cash-flow problems. Some landlords are able to provide some flexibility.

Postponement of income tax payments

To give workers and businesses a break, Minister of Finance Eric Girard announced that the deadline for the payment of taxes due and tax instalments has been postponed to July 31, 2020. This measure will deprive the government of \$7.7B but will allow taxpayers to benefit from additional cash.

New announcements to come for businesses and workers

A business assistance plan is being prepared and will be announced soon by Economy and Innovation Minister Pierre Fitzgibbon. The measures to be announced should total

a few hundred million dollars. These measures will be coordinated with the federal government and the Business Development Bank of Canada.

In addition, the federal government will be announcing tax and economic measures in the near future. The new measures should total nearly \$25B.