

Misericordia OR air quality disclosure

What is the issue?

Covenant Health is informing 473 patients who had surgery at the Misericordia Community Hospital this summer that heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) standards for positive pressure—one small factor contributing to air quality, which helps to prevent infection—were not adequately maintained during their procedure.

We at Covenant Health apologize that air pressure standards were not maintained during your time in the operating room and for any stress this news causes patients.

Who was impacted by this issue?

The disturbance in positive pressure occurred in:

- all surgeries in three of the Misericordia's 10 main operating rooms (OR) throughout June 21 to July 18, 2018
- all caesarian deliveries in the two Misericordia labour and delivery ORs throughout June 21 and July 18, 2018
- 19 additional surgeries in one main OR and two labour and delivery ORs during May 21 to June 21, 2018

Only a small portion of the patients who had surgeries during this two-month period were affected. The Misericordia performed 2,663 surgeries between May 21 and July 18, 2018. Over 82 per cent of patients who had surgeries during this time period were not impacted.

What is the potential impact to patients?

The increased risk of infection is considered to be very low. However, in keeping with our commitment to patient safety and transparency, all patients whose surgeries occurred during this event are being informed.

There is no ongoing increased risk to current surgical patients. Air quality standards in the OR are set by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and are being met.

All surgeries have a risk of infection. In keeping with safety standards, physicians conduct follow-up monitoring on patients for 30 or 90 days, depending on the procedure, to ensure this risk is monitored. Most of the patients we are notifying are past this standard monitoring period—and any complications they may have experienced would have been captured through this process.

Why is Covenant Health notifying patients?

Covenant Health is committed to patient safety and transparency and we have a responsibility to inform you about this issue. Our values guide our efforts to inform all patients whose surgeries were affected during this time frame, even when the risks are very low.

What is positive pressure and how does it support patient safety?

Maintaining proper air flow in an operating room through an HVAC system helps protect patients from infection during surgical procedures.

One component of operating room air flow is positive pressure ventilation which creates a protective environment. Operating rooms maintain a positive pressure compared to the surrounding space to minimize airflow from areas outside of the operating room that may be less sterile.

Positive pressure can be lost for a number of reasons, including the opening of a door to the operating room. When the BMS detects a loss of positive pressure for more than 15 minutes, an alarm is triggered with a status indicator in the control room.

Positive pressure is only one factor that contributes to air quality. Air quality operating room controls are one of many measures used to maintain an operating environment that helps prevent infection.

Are the operating rooms safe?

Yes. There is no ongoing increased risk to current surgical patients. Repairs to the system were made immediately when the incident was discovered on July 18.

Positive pressure in the ORs is currently meeting or exceeding CSA standards.

HVAC equipment has been tested to ensure it meets standards and to confirm accuracy of results. Field level testing of HVAC sensors is occurring weekly to ensure ongoing accuracy and will resume a monthly testing schedule as per CSA standards. OR theatres are continuously being monitored to ensure positive pressure.

What actions has Covenant Health taken?

We continue to investigate how and why the positive pressure event occurred. The Misericordia transitioned to a new BMS in May 2018. Covenant Health is conducting an internal review of the incident to determine all possible contributing factors—including equipment function, transition to a new BMS, training and practice.

We have engaged an external agency to provide a third-party review of systems and operational processes, including operational practices, maintenance, compliance and standard operating procedures.

We will not have a complete picture of the underlying cause of the event until the reviews are complete. We look forward to any recommendations brought forward as a result of the third-party review.

We will learn from this and use a thorough review as an opportunity for ongoing improvement.

How will patients be informed?

All patients who had surgery when HVAC standards for positive pressure were not maintained will be contacted by letter. Only those who receive a letter are potentially affected.

We will be taking the extra step of contacting 116 of these patients by phone because the nature of their procedure involved additional risk factors, such as implanted medical devices or other implants. These patients will receive a phone call between September 28 and October 3.

If patients are concerned, they are welcome to call Covenant Health Patient Relations at 1.877.295.6344.

What can patients do if they are concerned?

We recognize that some patients may have concerns about this news. We have worked with our physicians to ensure support for patients. If patients have health concerns, we encourage them to speak to their surgeon or obstetrician or call HealthLink at 811.

Patients can also call Covenant Health Patient Relations at 1.877.295.6344 for more information.