

Considerations for Traveling to Montreal during COVID-19: Primary Care Provider & Patient Checklist



As was the case before the COVID-19 pandemic, B.C. patients still have the option of accessing Medical Services Plan (MSP) funded lower gender-affirming surgery at **GRS Montreal** while the Vancouver Coastal Health **Gender Surgery Program BC** (GSP BC) continues to scale up. **Trans Care BC** consulted with B.C. public health officials and GRS Montreal to determine what information would help patients and providers make the decision about whether it is right for them to go ahead with surgery at GRS Montreal at this time.

This document can help with decision-making and planning. It is recommended that the questions be reviewed with patients before travelling to Montreal for surgery. Please ensure you have the most recent version of this document - the most recent copy can be requested from transcareteam@phsa.ca.

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1. As part of planning for your surgery, it can be helpful to check **Quebec's Regional Alert level** for Montreal.
 - Do you have any concerns about traveling and staying in Montreal?
 - Have you determined if there is a curfew in place?
 - If so, do you have printed documentation of your surgery to carry with you in case you need to justify traveling to and from GRS Montreal?
 2. Starting in January 2021, **GRS Montreal requires that patients have a negative COVID-19 test result collected within 72 hours before surgery.** There are **no exceptions** to this requirement (vaccines, previous infection, etc).
 - What is your plan for getting a COVID-19 test (and a copy of your results) done within a maximum of 72 hours before your surgery?

If you arrive in Montreal more than 72 hours in advance of your surgery:

 - Do you have the financial resources to pay privately for a COVID-19 test in Quebec (cost is between \$250-\$350)? This cost will not be reimbursed.
 - See Question #6 for considerations if your COVID-19 test result were to come back positive while you are in Montreal.
 3. Before you go to Montreal, it is important to check the **guidance on inter-provincial travel from the Government of BC.**
 - Have you reviewed BC's guidance on inter-provincial travel?

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4. If it is recommended that you self-isolate upon return to BC, the following questions will help you think about how to prepare your home and plan your care needs.
- Can you get all of your post-operative supplies ready at your house (or wherever you may be staying) before you travel to Montreal?
 - Can you get masks and other personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies ready before you travel to Montreal?
 - Will you be in close contact with anyone at this location who might be immunocompromised or at heightened risk for complications related to COVID-19?
 - How do you plan to travel to a clinic or ER if you need to be assessed in-person within the first 14 days of being home? (taxi, car ride from friend or family)?

Usually after a surgery, it is important to take several short walks a day to help with circulation and reduce the chances of developing a blood clot. If you need to self-isolate for the first 14 days of your return, this will mean that:

- you should not leave the house unless you are taking a short walk;
 - when you do take walks, you must: a) wear a mask; b) time your walk so that you are not around other people; and c) ensure you remain 6 feet from anyone nearby;
 - you should not leave the house if you develop any symptoms, except to access emergency health care;
 - you may want to obtain a letter from your surgeon or care provider saying it is medically necessary for you to take short, physically-distanced walks.
5. Do you have access to medical support should you need it? Have a plan with your GP or NP on how you will get support for any post-op concerns (help with pain management, etc), including if you need to self-isolate for the first 14 days. Ask your GP or NP the following questions:
- Is your GP or NP seeing patients right now? Virtually or in-person?
 - Is your GP or NP going to provide your post-operative care when you get home to B.C.?
 - Will your GP or NP be able to see you in clinic for post-operative care if you have respiratory symptoms or test positive for COVID-19?
 - If your GP or NP cannot see you in clinic, where will you go if you need in-person care?
6. If you develop COVID-19-like symptoms or test positive while you are in Montreal, you will need to stay in quarantine in Montreal until all symptoms have cleared and you test negative (this could be 14 days or more). You would need to pay for accommodation and this could cost around \$200/day (or more). These costs will not be reimbursed. Do you have the financial resources to:

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- Stay in Montreal longer than planned? Individuals with First Nations Health Authority may have some coverage: <https://www.fnha.ca/benefits/medical-transportation>
 - Pay for physician health care in Montreal (in hospital or the community) that is **unrelated to your surgery** and then later submit paperwork and receipts to Health Insurance BC (HIBC) to get reimbursed? (HIBC is the payment service for MSP.)
 - Pay for any flights that you need to re-book? If you develop COVID-19-like symptoms or test positive, you would need to re-book your return flights at your own expense. If you are travelling with Hope Air, they will be able to rebook for you if they are given as much notice as possible to ensure flight availability.
 - Consider buying travel insurance? Before purchasing, ask if your travel insurance will cover costs associated with prolonged stay due to COVID-19. You may already have travel insurance through any extended benefit plans or some credit card companies, but you should call and find out if it covers coverage for COVID-19.
7. Many clinics are providing virtual appointments during this time.
- Do you have access to a device (phone, tablet, computer, etc) for virtual care / long distance appointments?
 - Do you have a reliable wifi connection?
 - Have you contacted your doctor's office to find out what technology may be needed to set up a virtual appointment?
8. It is recommended to know where your closest COVID-19 testing location(s) are so you can plan how to get there safely if you need to once you are back in B.C..
- Do you know where your local COVID-19 testing location(s) are?
 - You can call 811 for information about the nearest testing site to you.
9. It is important to review the 'GRS Montreal COVID-19 Risk Recognition and Acceptance Form' to make sure you understand the risks associated with having surgery at GRS Montreal during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Have you reviewed this form yet?
 - Do you have any questions about it?
10. It is important to review the 'GRS Montreal COVID-19 Risk Recognition and Acceptance Form' to make sure you understand the risks associated with having surgery at GRS Montreal during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Do you have any concerns about traveling alone and staying in Montreal alone after your surgery?

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- Are there any things you perceive that might be more difficult to do without a companion? For example: travelling to the airport, support as you are preparing for surgery and recovering etc.
 - Do you have a device (cell phone, tablet, etc) or other ways to connect with your support people?
- 11.** If you plan to travel to Montreal with a companion, it is recommended that your travel companion follow the recommendations for physical distancing, travel, and other advice on preventing COVID-19 that are outlined in the 'GRS Montreal COVID-19 Risk Recognition and Acceptance Form'. GRS Montreal currently says that absolutely no visitors will be allowed in hospital or after-care centre after the surgery.
- Have you reviewed these recommendations with your travel companion?
 - Will your travel companion:
 - i. Follow the most up-to-date government guidance on travel restrictions?
 - ii. Practice physical distancing, hand washing, and other recommendations for preventing infection for **14 days before** the flight to Montreal?
 - Does your travel companion know they cannot visit you in the hospital or after-care centre?
- 12.** If you are booked for surgery in June or July 2021: During the month of August, both GRS Montreal and the Gender Surgery Program BC (where some clients in BC may access care if they are experiencing complications) may be closed. GRS Montreal will have staff available for urgent calls, however their staffing and surgeon availability might be more limited.
- Is your GP or NP available during the month of August if you develop any surgical complications or need any other post-operative support?
 - Do you have a plan for what to do or where to go if your GP or NP is not experienced with common post-operative complications? (for example, a local emergency room or urgent care centre)
 - Will your GP or NP be able to see you in clinic for post-operative care if you have respiratory symptoms or test positive for COVID-19?
 - Does your GP or NP have the contact information for the RACE Line? This is a phone line they can call and speak with an expert in transgender health, including surgery after care. RACE Line: 1-877-696-2131.
- 13.** For a list of virtual peer supports and counselling resources contact transcareteam@phsa.ca