

# Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Acute Care Occupancy

## Objective

To identify changes in occupancy rates in acute care hospitals and health centres during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Practice Points

- Beginning in Mar 2020, strategies were implemented to reduce occupancy in acute care facilities to ensure capacity for potential admissions of patients due to COVID-19. Designated facilities reserved beds/units specifically for COVID-19 patients.

## Data

Data on occupancy rates and acute bed numbers were obtained from the Department of Health and Community Services.

## Results

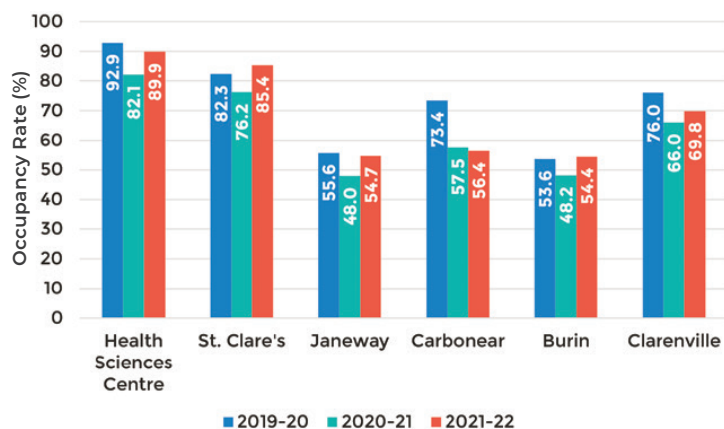


Figure 1. Occupancy Rates in Eastern Health Hospitals Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)

- St. Clare's had 192 acute beds in 2019–20, which were reduced to 182 acute beds in 2020–21 and 2021–22.
- In Eastern Health (EH), occupancy rates decreased by about 5 to 15% in the first year of the pandemic. Occupancy increased in the second year of the pandemic to approximately pre-pandemic levels in all hospitals in EH except Carbonear and Clarenville.

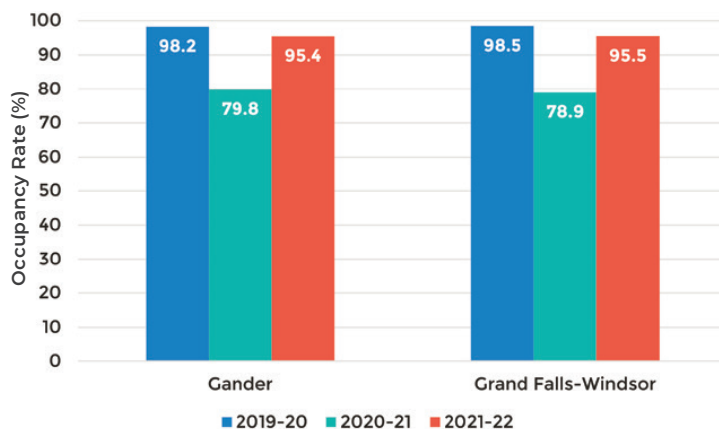


Figure 2. Occupancy Rates in Central Health Hospitals Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)

- Occupancy rates in both Central Health (CH) hospitals decreased by about 20% in the first year of the pandemic. Occupancy rates returned to almost pre-pandemic levels in the second year of the pandemic.

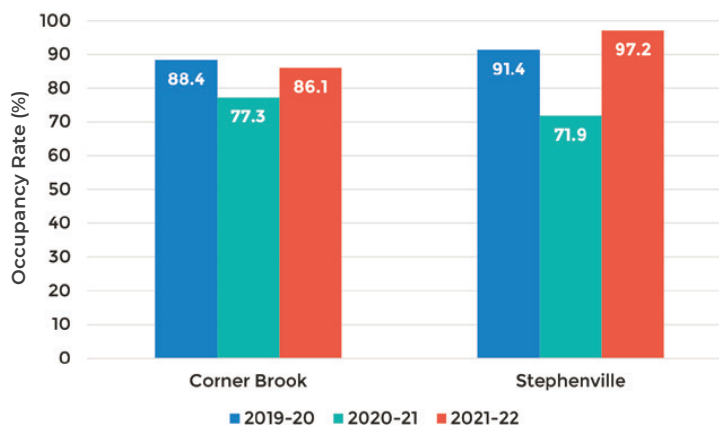
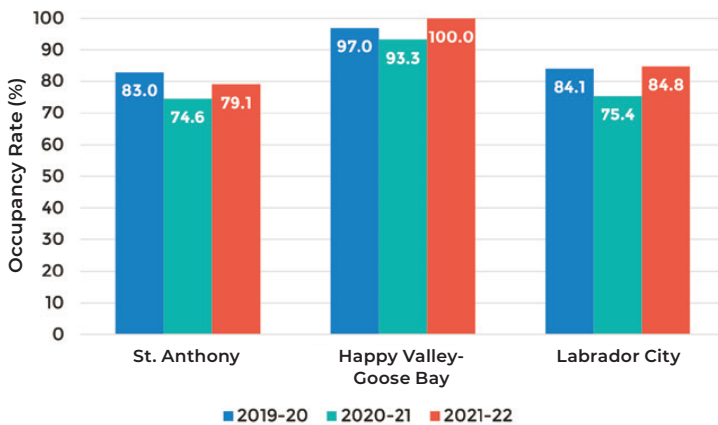


Figure 3. Occupancy Rates in Western Health Hospitals Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)

- Corner Brook had 201 acute beds in 2019–20, which were reduced to 165 acute beds in 2020–21 and 2021–22.

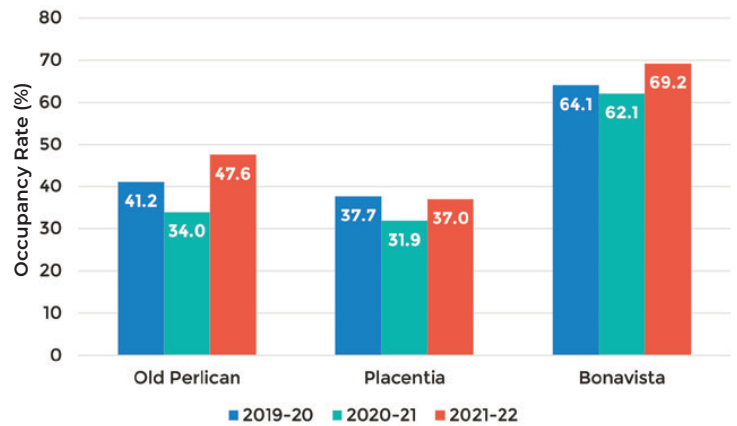
- In Western Health (WH), the occupancy rate in the hospital in Corner Brook decreased by 10% in the first year of the pandemic, but if the bed numbers had not also been reduced (as was not done at other sites), the occupancy would have fallen to 64.4%. The occupancy rate in the hospital in Stephenville decreased by about 20%. In the second year of the pandemic, the occupancy rate in Corner Brook increased to almost the pre-pandemic level, while in Stephenville the occupancy rate increased by 25% to exceed the pre-pandemic level.

Note: The occupancy in 2020–2021 was impacted by operational readiness of the new Western long-term care facility. 18 beds at Western Memorial Regional Hospital were closed in June 2020 as a result of this transition.



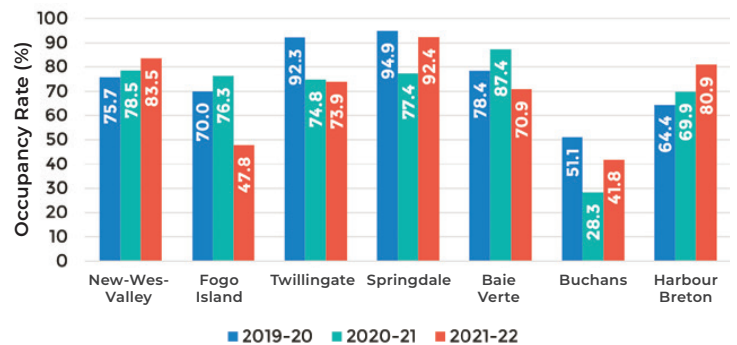
**Figure 4. Occupancy Rates in Labrador-Grenfell Health Hospitals Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)**

- In Labrador-Grenfell Health, occupancy rates in hospitals were reduced by 5–10% during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic but returned to approximately pre-pandemic levels during the second year of the pandemic.



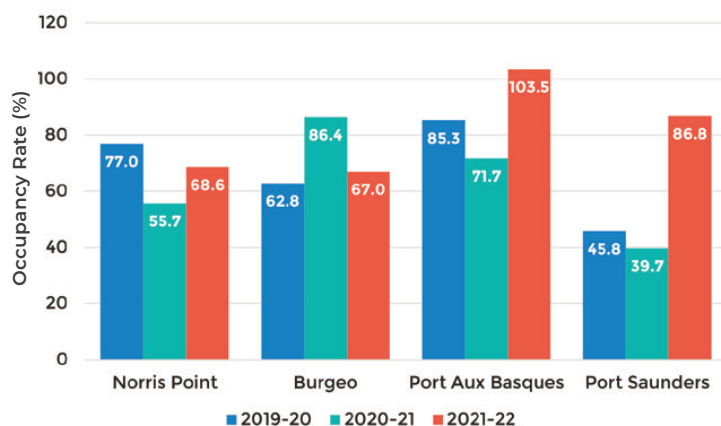
**Figure 5. Occupancy Rates in EH Health Centres Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)**

- In EH, occupancy rates in health centres decreased in the first year of the pandemic. Occupancy rates increased in the second year of the pandemic to above pre-pandemic levels in Old Perlican and Bonavista and to approximately the pre-pandemic level in Placentia.



**Figure 6. Occupancy Rates in CH Health Centres Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)**

- Changes in occupancy rates in health centres in CH during the pandemic were inconsistent across sites.



**Figure 7. Occupancy Rates in WH Health Centres Pre-COVID (2019–20) and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22)**

- Occupancy rates decreased in the first year of the pandemic in most health centres in WH. Occupancy rates increased in most health centres in the second year of the pandemic, remaining below the pre-pandemic level in Norris Point but rising 20–40% above the pre-pandemic rates in Port Aux Basques and Port Saunders. The opposite pattern occurred in Burgeo, where the occupancy rate increased almost 25% in the first year of the pandemic and then decreased to just above pre-pandemic levels in the second year.

## Conclusions

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, several hospitals, particularly in the CH and WH regions, were operating above optimal occupancy levels and would not have had capacity for a surge of COVID-19 admissions.
- All hospitals in the province and some health centres decreased occupancy rates during the first year of the pandemic. In the second year of the pandemic, occupancy rates returned to approximately pre-pandemic levels in most acute care facilities.
- The types of initiatives employed to reduce occupancy rates should be examined to explore if occupancy was reduced through a reduction in care (e.g., postponing elective procedures) which should not be continued longer than necessary, or through improved efficiency/care processes (e.g., supporting patients with home care rather than as alternate level of care patients) which could improve the quality and efficiency of the health care system if maintained long term.