



Update for Partners

COVID-19

March 20, 2020

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Message from the Medical Officer of Health

On March 17, the Government of Ontario declared a **state of emergency** to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and preserve health care system capacity in the province. This action, which requires the closure of some businesses and establishments, was taken in consultation with Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, and is in follow-up to the [statement](#) made March 16.

It is recognized that these are difficult measures for our local businesses, but we know that avoiding close interactions with others helps reduce the spread of illness. Our community needs to work together to slow the spread and impact of COVID-19. **The importance of these measures cannot be overstated at this critical time. We are asking people to practice social distancing, which involves taking steps to limit the number of people you come into close contact with. I encourage you to promote these messages and other preventative actions people can take to avoid diseases to your own employees, workplaces, constituents and clients.** Please see more information about social distancing below.

Information and resources to support you can be found at www.smdhu.org/coronavirus.

Dr. Charles Gardner
Medical Officer of Health

Current Situation (as of 10:00 on March 20, 2020)

Local Situation – Simcoe Muskoka

There are eight confirmed cases and two probable cases of COVID-19 in the region. There has been one virus-related death in Simcoe Muskoka. SMDHU is following up with known contacts of the cases.

NEW SMDHU's [COVID-19 HealthSTATS webpage](#) is live and provides daily weekday updates on the status of people with the virus within the region. See SMDHU's [press releases](#) for more information.

NEW – On March 18, the [County of Simcoe declared an emergency](#) as a result of COVID-19 pandemic developments in our region which includes many County services and facilities being closed to the public. Check the [County of Simcoe](#) and [District of Muskoka](#) websites for information about closures and changes to their programs and services.

Provincial Situation – Ontario

As of March 19, 2020, there were 43 more people diagnosed with COVID-19, increasing the total confirmed cases in Ontario to 257. This includes five resolved and two deceased (including one new death reported by [Halton Region](#)). There have been over 12,000 negative tests and approximately 4,000 people who are currently under investigation.

For the most up-to-date information on the status of COVID-19 in Ontario see the [Province of Ontario website](#)

The [Government of Ontario declared a state of emergency](#) on March 17 to prevent the continued spread of COVID-19 and preserve capacity in the health care system. This declaration **requires the continued closure of many businesses and organizations** to close or adjust how services are provided, including all: indoor recreation facilities; public libraries; private schools; licensed child care centres; theatres and movie cinemas; concert venues; and bars and restaurants (unless able to switch to takeout or delivery service methods). It is also recommended that churches and other places of worship close. In addition the declaration **prohibits public gatherings/events of over 50 people.**

Public Gatherings/Events

- As per the declaration of a state of emergency in Ontario, all municipalities, workplaces, event organizers or planners must suspend all events or public gatherings over 50 people.

- All organizers **must notify the health unit** of **any** potential public gatherings or events (of 50 people or less – those above 50 people are precluded by the provincial declaration of emergency) so we can support the assessment of risk and assist in putting in place infection prevention and control measures to protect those in attendance.
 - For gatherings/events of 50 people or less, consider cancelling or postponing all non-essential gatherings (e.g. large dinners), particularly those that will include international attendees or vulnerable populations.
 - It is recommended that necessary meetings and events be held virtually rather than in person, or be cancelled/postponed.
 - The following document can assist with the risk assessment: [Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 global outbreak](#)

Social Distancing

Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a [statement](#) describing how to **practice social distancing** if you do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 stating: “Everyone in Ontario should **avoid close contact with people outside of their immediate families**. Close contact includes being **within 2 meters** (6 feet) of another person.”

Social distancing involves taking steps to limit the number of people you come into close contact with. Social distancing includes, but is not limited to:

- working from home where possible;
- avoiding visits to long-term care homes, retirement homes, supportive housing, hospices and other congregate care settings unless the visit is absolutely essential;
- avoiding non-essential trips in the community;
- ensuring vehicle windows are down if you have to go into the community for an essential trip via taxi or rideshare;
- limiting or cancelling group gatherings;
- conducting meetings virtually instead of in person.
- spending time outside and in settings where people can maintain a 2 metre (6 feet) distance from each other.

Please note: that these guidelines are not meant to say “you must stay in your home!” You can still go outside to take a walk, go to the park, or walk your dog. If you need groceries, go to the store. We simply recommend that while outside you make sure to avoid crowds and maintain a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from those around you.

Public signage on social distancing coming soon: visit the health unit’s [website](#).

OTHER

- **NEW** – All evictions from rental housing have been suspended until further notice
- **NEW** – There is increased phishing and malicious activity using COVID19/Corona Pandemic as the lure. Organizations are advised to continue to follow email hygiene/phishing best practices to defend against increased activity.
- Current visitors to [provincial parks](#) will be required to vacate by March 19, 2020. Any person or group with a reservation for arrival up to April 30, 2020 will automatically be provided a full refund with no penalty.
- [Ontario Extending Validation Periods](#) for Driver, Vehicle and Carrier Products, Services and Health Cards
- Ontario Protecting [Critical Front-Line Justice Services](#) in Response to COVID-19

National Situation – Canada

As of March 19, 2020, there are 846 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Canada and 10 virus-related deaths. Of these cases, 69% are travellers and 13% are close contacts of travellers. A detailed [epidemiologic curve](#) is also available.

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation in Canada see the [Government of Canada website](#)

Travel/Border

The Governments of Canada and Ontario have communicated travel advice to Canadians to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including:

NEW

- Anyone who has travelled outside of Canada should:
 - self-isolate for 14 days when they return. People who are self-isolating should not go to work
 - monitor themselves for symptoms of the COVID-19 for 14 days after returning to Canada
 - If they develop symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing) they should remain isolated for 14 days or until 24 hours after symptoms resolve. If their symptoms worsen, they should seek assessment with their health care provider, assessment centre or emergency department.
- This direction now includes health care workers.

- There may be exceptions for essential service workers deemed critical for operations, and workers who are essential to the movement of goods and people, who should self-monitor for 14 days (and self-isolate if they develop respiratory symptoms).
- As of March 21, non-essential travel between Canada and the USA will not be permitted.
- Canadian have also been advised to:
 - avoid all non-essential travel outside the country until further notice; and
 - return to Canada via commercial means while they remain available.
- **NEW** Canada-U.S. border closure to tourists and non-essential visitors is likely to occur by the weekend (according to the Prime Minister's statement, likely during the night between Friday-Saturday). Exceptions will be made for air crews, diplomats, immediate family members and U.S. citizens. Border restrictions will not apply to commerce or trade, and products will continue to flow in and out of the country.
- **NEW** Airlines will ban anyone who is showing symptoms of the virus from getting on a plane.
- **NEW** All international flights will be redirected to one of four airports in Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary).

Because Information about travel is changing rapidly visit travel.gc.ca for the latest travel advice. Frequently consult the [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) to understand recommendations for travellers returning home for affected areas.

NEW - Financial Impacts

- The Government of Canada announced its Economic Plan in response to COVID-19 which includes:
 - A deferred tax filing date for individuals, including certain trusts.
 - However, individuals who expect to receive benefits under the Goods and Services Tax Credit or the Canada Child Benefit are encouraged to not delay the filing of their tax return to ensure their entitlements for the 2020-21 benefit year are properly determined.
 - A deferral of payment of any income tax amounts.

Global Situation

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation globally see: Daily [WHO Situation Report](#), [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control website](#), and downloadable [daily data on the global geographic distribution of COVID-19 virus](#) on an [interactive situation dashboard](#).

Risk Assessment

- On March 15, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer declared the threat from COVID-19 pandemic as **serious**.
 - Community transmission is being experienced in Canada and Ontario, meaning the source of the illness cannot be traced.

Vulnerable populations

- There is an increased risk of more severe outcomes of COVID-19 for Canadians:
 - aged 65 and over
 - with compromised immune systems
 - with underlying medical conditions

Public Health Planning and Response

SMDHU

- The SMDHU Health Connection line continues to have extended hours of operation and created a dedicated line to respond to calls about COVID-19 at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. 5829. Extended hours of operation of Health Connection as of March 17:
 - Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 - Saturday and Sunday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Health sector partners continue to be updated as often as necessary with new information and/or updated guidance documents and resources through [HealthFAXs](#) and through easy access links on our [health professional portal](#).
- As we have entered into the Incident/Emergency Status Phase of [Infectious Disease Emergency Response Plan](#), many health unit staff continue to be actively redeployed into other positions within the agency. This disruption to our everyday business means that it is not business as usual for the health unit and as a consequence certain health unit functions have been deferred or curtailed until our response to COVID-19 is over.
- Communities, organizations, businesses and families will experience changes and disruption to normal life as measures are taken to limit the spread of the virus locally, provincially and nationally. Guidance for specific sectors, workplaces and individuals about these changes are posted on our [website](#).

Local

NEW – [Assessment Centres](#)

In order to meet the growing needs of area residents with medical concerns related to COVID-19, dedicated assessment centres have been opened. Information about when to attend an assessment centre, what to bring and what to expect can be found on the SMDHU [website](#).

Barrie 490 Huronia Road, Barrie located at the rear of the Eagle Ridge complex. It is **NOT** at the Huronia Urgent Care Clinic. This week (Monday, March 16 to Sunday March 22), the assessment centre hours are as follows:

- Tuesday, March 17 to Sunday, March 22: 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Collingwood Collingwood General and Marine Hospital - front of the emergency entrance 459 Hume Street, Collingwood.

- Open seven days per week from 7:00 am to 10:30 pm.
- All patients are requested to complete the [online COVID 19 Self-Assessment](#) before arriving to the Assessment Center.

Orillia Orillia Soldiers Memorial Hospital Kiwanis Building, 170 Colborne Street West, Orillia, ON. The public can access this [drive thru clinic](#) from the Volunteer Drive entrance. Volunteer Drive has temporarily been designated a one way street and the public are asked to enter from Mississauga Street. You will be asked to stay in your car until you screened and receive further instructions.

- 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (The last patient will be seen at 6:30 p.m.)

The [Simcoe Muskoka interagency pandemic plan](#) (updated in 2010 to support the County of Simcoe and the District of Muskoka in the event of an influenza pandemic) is available to others to adapt for their response to COVID-19.

Provincial

NEW – New guidance is coming for health measures for:

- health care workers returning from travel outside of Canada, including those working in long-term care homes;
- restriction of visitors to hospitals; and
- the ramp down of elective and non-emergent activities for regulated health professionals and group practices of regulated health professionals.

NEW The Ministry is:

- Assessing additional spaces in community for use to alleviate capacity pressures experienced by hospitals and long-term care.
- Putting in efforts to procure additional ventilators, personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves and surgical masks.
- Working to improve surveillance using the Acute Care Enhanced Surveillance (ACES) system.
- Working to support the expansion of virtual home care delivery by health professionals including nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dietetics, and social work.

NEW Public Health Ontario has updated their site related to [COVID-19 testing](#) including an updated list of accepted swab types.

NEW The Ontario Ministry of Health recommends hospitals only allow essential visitors until further notice. Essential visitors are:

- Those who have a patient who is dying or very ill;

- A parent of an ill child or youth;
- A patient undergoing surgery; or
- A woman giving birth.

NEW Canadian Blood Services states it is important for healthy individuals to continue to donate blood.

Provincial Resources

- **NEW** The Ministry of Health has made a [self-assessment tool](#) available to Ontarians to help direct the public, especially as more people return to Canada following international travel.
- **NEW** documents have been updated and added to the Ministry of Health’s website including:
 - [Guidance for Personal Service Settings \(PSS\)](#)
 - [Guidance for Food Premises Best Practices Summary Sheet](#)
 - [Guidance for Independent Health Facilities](#)
 - [Guidance documents](#) for health sectors organizations
 - [Guidance for pharmacies](#)
 - [Guidance for Long-Term Care Homes](#)
 - [A checklist for Long-Term Care homes](#)
 - [Updated case definition](#) based on the most up-to-date evidence
 - Infection Prevention and Control ([IPAC](#)) [recommendations](#) for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for care of individuals with suspect or confirmed COVID-19
- The following fact sheets are available on the [Public Health Ontario website](#):
 - **NEW** - Cleaning and disinfection in public settings
 - Self-monitoring for symptoms
 - Self-isolation
 - Guidance for caregivers, household members and close contacts

National

- [Guidance documents](#) area available for:
 - Communities;
 - Health professionals; and
 - Businesses.
- Procurement measures are being put in place to assist industry partners to re-tool for medical supplies (e.g. ventilators).

International

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has:
 - Partnered to establish a [COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund](#) to support WHO and partners in helping countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Released [key considerations for planning of large mass gathering events](#).
- Provided [recommendations to reduce risk of transmission](#) from animals to humans.

Other Available Resources

- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) (OMOH)
- [Government of Canada](#) (GOC)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)
- [World Health Organization](#) (WHO)