

June 10, 2020

Dear CAOs for the municipalities in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, and of the four First Nations located in Simcoe Muskoka:

On Monday, June 8, 2020, the Province of Ontario outlined plans to move to Phase 2, Stage 2 of the [Re-Opening Ontario Plan](#). Stage 2 will commence on Friday, June 12, 2020. With the initiation of Stage 2, it is anticipated that requests from the public for municipal and community services will increase and therefore, the need to prepare for staff returning to offices and opening offices to the public is essential to your operations. In follow up to letters provided to you on April 14 and May 12, 2020, the following correspondence provides information to assist your municipality and community in resuming operations and public services in your community workplaces.

The need for on-going vigilance in protecting employees and citizens from COVID-19 in workplaces and offices is a priority in Simcoe and Muskoka as the pandemic continues to impact our communities. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is preparing for continuing and future wave(s) of transmission in Simcoe and Muskoka over the course of the pandemic, which may last up to two years. The development and availability of a vaccine is the most likely end point of our collective response, potentially in 2021. Future waves may come as a series of repetitive smaller spikes in transmission starting in summer of 2020 and then consistently over the coming 1-2 years as certain provincial restrictive measures are relaxed and then reinstituted, or, alternatively, the next wave could occur in the fall or winter of 2020 as a larger wave than the spring wave, followed by one or more smaller subsequent waves in 2021. To be prepared for such scenarios, SMDHU has provided resources for workplaces and businesses on our [website](#). Further, the following strategies are encouraged to assist you as an employer in ensuring a safe environment for staff and citizens now and into the future:

Innovative Office/Workplace Strategies

- Continue to implement work-from-home strategies and flexible work hours in your workplace where possible. Having staff work from home reduces the potential for transmission in the workplace and allows for more space for staff that are required to be in the office. At SMDHU, we continue to have the majority of our staff working remotely and are planning on continuing this practice until which time a vaccine is available to achieve population immunity/protection.
- For larger workplaces (greater than 100 employees), cohorting (or 'bubbling') of staff is recommended where physical distancing is difficult to maintain. Cohorting involves keeping groups of people together. Cohorting may reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other over the course of a week, potentially reducing the number of workers outside of the cohort in being exposed to the virus.
- Press conferences and meetings are encouraged to take place remotely using technology to facilitate briefings to the public and media to avoid gatherings of greater than 10 persons.
- As we approach the summer, you may be considering the use of your municipal spaces for the purpose of a cooling shelter. A guidance document for running a cooling shelter safely regarding COVID-19 is provided at this [link](#).

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15 Sperling Drive
Barrie, ON
L4M 6K9
705-721-7520
FAX: 705-721-1495

□ **Collingwood:**
280 Pretty River Pkwy.
Collingwood, ON
L9Y 4J5
705-445-0804
FAX: 705-445-6498

□ **Cookstown:**
2-25 King Street S.
Cookstown, ON
L0L 1L0
705-458-1103
FAX: 705-458-0105

□ **Gravenhurst:**
2-5 Pineridge Gate
Gravenhurst, ON
P1P 1Z3
705-684-9090
FAX: 705-684-9887

□ **Huntsville:**
34 Chaffey St.
Huntsville, ON
P1H 1K1
705-789-8813
FAX: 705-789-7245

□ **Midland:**
A-925 Hugel Ave.
Midland, ON
L4R 1X8
705-526-9324
FAX: 705-526-1513

□ **Orillia:**
120-169 Front St. S.
Orillia, ON
L3V 4S8
705-325-9565
FAX: 705-325-2091

Screening

- Continue to screen your staff for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) before arriving at the workplace. Staff coming into the office should complete the [Provincial Screening tool](#) and report results of their assessment to their employer prior to each work shift.
- Employees who fail the [Provincial screening tool](#) should not be permitted to come to work. They should be directed to a [local assessment centre](#) for further assessment and/or testing and wait for results until determining if/when they are able to return to work.

Client Interactions

- Limit the number of customers/clients your employees would have close contact with (ie. fewer scheduled appointments, limited number of patrons in the workplace at any one time). SMDHU recommends documenting the contact information of individuals who come in for services and attend work, to enable contact follow up for possible case exposures.
- While the Province has announced that effective Friday, June 12, 2020 at 12:01 a.m., the limit on social gatherings will increase from five to ten people across the province, in-person meetings (internal meetings or permitting meeting rooms to be rented) should continue to be discouraged.
- For areas in your municipal offices and other worksites that are accessible to the public, use signage/posters provided by the [Provincial government](#).

Personal Protective Equipment and Physical Distancing

- If physical distancing is difficult to maintain between employees or between an employee and a member of the public, employees are recommended to [wear a cloth mask](#) to help protect others from asymptomatic transmission.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies keep your employees and customers/clients safe, where warranted. PPE is in high demand and the needs of frontline health care workers and first responders will continue to be prioritized. Access the [Workplace PE Supplier Directory](#) for a list of companies that sell PPE and related supplies.
- Ensure that staff required to attend offices are separated by physical means and at least 2 metres of distance. It is recommended that staff that interact with the public should have barriers that permit 2 metres of distance between them and the public and if possible, a physical barrier such as plexiglass is preferred.

Infection Prevention and Control Planning and Education

- Reinforce [cough etiquette](#) and [hand hygiene](#) by staff and visitors.
- Ensure routine and frequent [cleaning and disinfection occurs](#) throughout the day in workspaces.
- Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees and how to reduce these risks.
- Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members and/or possible repeat closure of early childhood programs and schools.
- Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for the potential of a positive employee or visitor in your workplace. Individuals testing positive for COVID-19 will be directed by SMDHU to self-isolate. Individuals that have had close contact (ie. spent prolonged time within a 2-metre radius) with this employee/visitor will be contacted by SMDHU if they need to take additional precautions.

In [Appendix A](#) below, I have provided links to local, provincial and federal tools that the health unit has referenced for settings and activities consistent with local communities. SMDHU remains committed to providing web updates on the provincial Emergency Orders and information for the public and our municipalities at <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19>. For further information on the requirements to assist your municipality, please contact a Public Health Inspector 1-877-721-7520.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

CG:cm

Encl. (1)

Appendix A

Topic	Source	Hyperlink
Sector-Specific resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace	Government of Ontario	Click Here
Re-Opening and Operating Your Business Safely	SMDHU	Click Here
COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces	Government of Ontario	Click Here
COVID-19 and Ontario's Human Rights Code – Questions and Answers	Ontario Human Rights Commission	Click Here
Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace	Ontario Ministry of Labour	Click Here
Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic	Government of Canada	Click Here
Re-opening Ontario Framework	Province of Ontario	Click Here
Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 For Social & Community Services (Group Homes) Employers	Public Services Health & Safety Association	Click Here
Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 For Employers of Office Settings	Public Services Health & Safety Association	Click Here
COVID-19: Precautions When Working As A Transit Worker	Public Services Health & Safety Association	Click Here
Workplace Safety & Prevention Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Office Administration and Secretarial Staff during COVID-19	Workplace Safety & Prevention Services	Click Here