

Update for Partners

COVID-19

March 18, 2020

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Message from the Medical Officer of Health

Yesterday (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 establishment, 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.

Current Situation (as of 15:00 on March 18, 2020)

Provincial Situation - Ontario

NEW 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. A variety of establishments must close or adjust how they provide service. In addition the declaration **prohibits public gatherings/events of over 50 people**. The declaration of a state of emergency **requires the immediate closure of:**

- 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**.

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).
- It is recommended that necessary meetings and events be held virtually rather than in person, or be cancelled/postponed.
- 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
 - Organizers who have questions about gatherings are encouraged to contact the health unit so we can support the assessment of risk and assist in putting in place infection prevention and control measures to protect those in attendance.
 - The following document can assist with the risk assessment: [Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 global outbreak](#)

Social Distancing

- On March 16, 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.
- For more detailed information on social distancing, visit the health unit's [website](#).

NEW – On March 15, the Ontario Minister of Health released a statement that the province has requested hospitals to [carefully ramp down elective surgeries and other non-emergent clinical activity](#) to preserve health care system capacity.

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

Local Situation – Simcoe Muskoka

NEW – There are two new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the region, for a total of five confirmed cases. We are following up with known contacts of these cases. The public was informed of the fourth case through a [press release](#) and press conference on March 15.

- The region's first case was identified at a press conference on [Thursday March 12](#).

NEW – SMDHU's [COVID-19 Health Stats webpage](#) is live and provides daily weekday updates on the status of the virus cases within the region.

National Situation – Canada

NEW – On March 16, the Government of Canada communicated additional travel advice to Canadians to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including:

- Avoid all non-essential travel outside the country until further notice.
- Canadian travellers return to Canada via commercial means while they remain available.
- All travellers returning to Canada self-isolate for 14 days from the date of return to Canada (there are exceptions for workers who are essential to the movement of goods and people).

In our last communique last week it was noted that Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams announced that children travelling with their families outside of Canada would be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return to Canada. However on March 16, Dr. Williams communicated that all travellers coming from out of country in the preceding 14 days should self-isolate for 14 days, except health care and essential service workers who should self-monitor for 14 days (and self-isolate if they develop respiratory symptoms).

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

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 discussed 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.
- Communities, organizations, businesses and families need to continue to be prepared for disruption to normal life as measures are taken to limit the spread of the virus locally, provincially and nationally. Information and tips about how to prepare are posted on our [website](#).

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

Canadian travellers

- There are increased health risks for Canadian travellers abroad. Because of these risks, the Government of Canada advises you to avoid non-essential travel outside of Canada until further notice. This includes cruise ships.
- 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.

Public Health Planning and Response

SMDHU

- The SMDHU Health Connection line has 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](#) including business continuity planning, at this time many health unit staff have been 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 are being assessed and either deferred or being curtailed until our response to COVID-19 is over. This includes postponing all onsite programming (e.g. prenatal classes, non-emergency dental services and food handler exams).

- We have heard locally of employers requesting employees gain medical clearance to return to work. We do not support employers requiring staff with no travel history to areas with a travel advisory and upper respiratory infections to be cleared by a physician before returning to work if their symptoms have resolved.

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 at:

1. 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.

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

- The assessment centre will be open seven days per week from 7:00 am to 10:30 pm. During those hours a physician or nurse practitioner will be onsite.
- All patients are requested to complete the online COVID 19 Self-Assessment before arriving to the Assessment Center. A link to the tool can be found on the CGMH website - cgmh.on.ca.
- Please be aware that the swab test for COVID-19 is restricted to patients who meet the government screening criteria and are not available to all patients on request. Patients requiring more extensive assessment will be moved to the CGMH Emergency Department. Those with less severe symptoms will be provided with appropriate care and given instructions for follow up if necessary.

More information about when to attend an assessment centre, what to bring and what to expect can be found on the SMDHU [website](#).

NEW – On March 16, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) co-hosted a joint COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness Forum to assist with planning for the potential arrival of widespread community transmission of the virus. Partners at the forum discussed 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), which can be adapted by others to coordinate their response to COVID-19.

Provincial

NEW – Provincial guidelines for COVID-19 **testing** are as follows:

- Persons who are asymptomatic – showing no symptoms - will not be tested.
- People with mild symptoms should isolate at home until 24 hours after symptoms resolve and do not need to go to the emergency department or assessment centres for further assessment and testing.
- If your symptoms worsen, before visiting any healthcare facility, call ahead, let them know about travel history and symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, difficulty breathing) so that they can make special arrangements to see you quickly and ensure that they use proper infection control measures.

- **NEW** – On March 1, the Ontario Ministry of Health announced plans to [expand Telehealth Ontario service capacity](#). The Ministry has also provided:
 - [Self-Assessment Tool](#)
 - [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
 - [Guidance documents](#) for health sectors organizations
- 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

- The Public Health Agency of Canada has developed [guidance documents](#) for communities, schools and daycares, health professionals and businesses.

International

- **NEW** 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)