

August 10, 2020

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

In Simcoe Muskoka we have made excellent progress in flattening the curve and greatly reducing the transmission of COVID-19 through our collective diligence in maintaining physical distancing (and keeping to no more than the 10 individuals in our social circles with whom we can maintain closer physical contact), hand hygiene, self-monitoring, self-isolation (if we develop symptoms) and testing, and the use of face coverings in indoor public spaces. Our municipalities have been critical to this success, with excellent leadership and support from our municipal councils. However, as we have seen in a number of jurisdictions in Canada and internationally, COVID-19 can very easily surge into new waves that threaten the gains that we have made in our personal freedom, and in our social and economic well-being. With each stage in opening the economy, and with the recommencement of schools in the fall, we all need to remain committed to these daily practices to compensate for the added risk of transmission that comes with these changes. It is very important that we do not confuse the opening of the economy and schools with an end to the risk of a resurgence of COVID-19; in fact the risk remains and is very real, and we must all do our part to control this risk.

Given the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to reiterate the control measures that I recommended for our municipalities in my [letter](#) on July 20th. These measures apply to both the functions of council meetings, and to the approach to municipal service provision to the public. More recently I have been asked about the potential for councils to commence meeting in-person again, and with regard to this the need for council members to wear face coverings during in-person council meetings. Given the ongoing potential for COVID-19 transmission, and the rigorous requirements that would need to be in place to hold public in-person meetings of council (as per my July 20th letter), I continue to recommend that it would be preferable to continue council meetings via remote means.

However, if any councils were to decide to proceed with in-person meetings, my July 20th letter does provide the requirements to help safeguard this. This includes the requirement for face coverings to be worn within the council indoor environment at all times, being a publically accessible space. To be consistent with our [places of worship guidance document](#) specific to public speaking, public speakers (including council members during in-person council meetings) are to be at least 4 metres separated from each other and from the attendants if/while they are not wearing a face covering. Another alternative would be for plexiglass to be used while speaking without a face covering or mask as a sufficient barrier between the speakers and participants. Even with these measures, one concern I have with council members not wearing face coverings during council meetings would be the potential for public confusion regarding the requirement to wear face coverings in indoor public spaces.

The example that council members set regarding the maintenance of these practices is crucial to maintaining public support and compliance with these essential practices. Thus it is very important that councils and municipalities continue comply with the precautions that I have identified in my July 20th letter and in this letter, including with regard to face coverings in indoor public spaces.

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Thank you once again for the excellent leadership and support that our municipal councils have provided in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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Medical Officer of Health

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