

March 6, 2021

To the people of Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia:

The province has announced that Simcoe Muskoka is moving back into the Red-Control zone within the province's COVID-19 Framework, effective Monday, March 8 at 12:01 a.m. The return to Red-Control on March 8th, as well as the move to Grey-Lockdown one week ago, are in keeping with recommendations that I provided to the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams. My recommendation of a return to Red-Control is based on information that our overall incidence of COVID-19 has remained stable over the past two weeks despite the rise in the B.1.1.7 (UK) variant.

It is important to remember that with large numbers of the B.1.1.7 variant cases in Simcoe Muskoka, and with the rise in Variants of Concern throughout the province, we may see an increase in the incidence of COVID-19 in the weeks to come, and the potential need for further protective measures in the future. The potential for a third wave in Ontario due to the Variants of Concern has been noted by the [Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table](#) to be significant. As such, it is of critical importance that we be diligent in maintaining our public health measures. I will continue to monitor very closely our local situation, and early next week I will be bringing forward additional infection prevention and control measures to reduce transmission risk in workplaces and in the community.

We have a very large number of cases and outbreaks of the B.1.1.7 variant in Simcoe Muskoka. This started with three outbreaks of the B.1.1.7 variant in January, which has been followed by rapid spread throughout Simcoe County (including in Barrie) and the District of Muskoka. We have seen many workplace outbreaks (including restaurants, a personal service setting, offices, manufacturing, and an agricultural setting), long-term care facilities, a childcare centre, a school and an apartment complex. There have also been a large and growing number of cases in the community that are unattached to outbreaks. We have the highest number of the variants of concern cases in Ontario.

In continuing to relay the basis upon which recent recommendations were made, I wish to reiterate that early in the week of February 21, I became concerned as a result of the 30% increase in Simcoe Muskoka's overall COVID-19 case count in the previous week (210 cases the week of February 7 to 275 cases the week of February 14), including a doubling of the weekly case count in Barrie, coinciding with the continued spread of the B.1.1.7 variant in our communities. On this basis, I recommended to the province that Simcoe Muskoka be moved into Grey-Lockdown in order to help reduce the spread of the B.1.1.7 variant and COVID-19 overall, with the recognition that early control actions are more effective than later ones. I did so even though the overall case count for COVID-19 was only moderately elevated above the threshold for the Red-Control zone, as the province's Framework does not take into account the potential impact of the UK variant.

Since then, we have continued to monitor the data on COVID-19 cases, and we found some reduction in the overall daily incidence in the latter part of last week and stabilization of the overall incidence of

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cases through this week (February 28 to March 5); however, we have had some additional B.1.1.7 variant outbreaks in workplaces and additional cases in our communities.¹

I wish to thank those who have reached out to me and provide me with their insights. The concerns raised included impacts of the Lockdown on businesses, income, health and mental health, and access to services. I regret the difficulty that is caused by our response to the pandemic, even as we strive to reduce the illness and the deaths that occur from this tragic pandemic. The pandemic has been extremely difficult on us all.

I would like to cite the great potential to bring the pandemic under control with immunization. At present we have immunized the residents of all of our long-term care facilities and retirement homes, and this is resulting in a great reduction in transmission and deaths among the most vulnerable members of our communities. As we move forward with bringing vaccination to all adults and we continue with case and contact management and observing public health measures, I am confident that we will bring the pandemic under control.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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

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¹ Data on our COVID-19 cases can be found on our [Health Stats website](#).