August 18, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We know that it has been difficult to make decisions about whether to send your child or children to school or have them do on-line learning. Everyone's situation is different, and the decision to send your children to school in-person needs to be one that works for you and your family. From our local experience (as outlined in our situational assessment) it is clear that returning to school is very important for children and youth. It's good for their education, good for their well-being, and good for the whole family. However, as we open up more spaces for people to gather (like schools), there will be the potential for more cases of COVID-19. Unfortunately, in living with this risk we cannot prevent all cases, but we can take action to prevent outbreaks and to reduce the numbers of cases. We've highlighted below some information for you to think about as the return to school draws closer.

Attending school in Simcoe Muskoka is a safe choice for most children and families at this time.

Your school is committed to creating a caring learning environment, and the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is working closely with school boards to prevent COVID-19 transmission as much as possible, to identify and manage cases of COVID-19 and to prevent its further spread in schools. We have been in close communication with our school boards throughout the pandemic. Keeping community transmission low is key to keeping schools safer, and COVID-19 rates locally are very low currently. You are welcome to view our COVID 19 HealthSTATS page for up-to-date information on our local situation.

Mostly, children infected with COVID-19 get a very mild illness and recover without much help. A very small number of children get a severe inflammatory disease, and we don't yet know much about what puts children at risk for that. It is very unusual in childhood/adolescence to have a condition which puts them at increased risk for significant disease from COVID-19.

Schools will have many measures in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 being introduced into the school setting, and to lessen the risk of spread if COVID-19 is introduced, such as:

- requiring you to screen your child for symptoms each day
- prompt isolation of sick children and staff
- physical distancing to the extent possible
- enhanced cleaning measures
- cohorting (keeping groups together) to the extent possible
- the use of face coverings for most students and staff

Students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a face covering indoors on school property. Students may wear their own non-medical masks, and non-medical masks will also be made available for students. Some exceptions to the face covering requirement will apply. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are encouraged but not required to wear a face covering in indoor spaces. Teachers are required to wear medical masks and school-based staff who are regularly in close contact with students will be required to wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE).

❏ Barrie:	❏ Collingwood:	❏ Cookstown:	❏ Gravenhurst:	❏ Huntsville:	❏ Midland:	❏ Orillia:
15 Sperling Drive	280 Pretty River Pkwy.	2-25 King Street S.	2-5 Pineridge Gate	34 Chaffey St.	A-925 Hugel Ave.	120-169 Front St. S.
Barrie, ON	Collingwood, ON	Cookstown, ON	Gravenhurst, ON	Huntsville, ON	Midland, ON	Orillia, ON
L4M 6K9	L9Y 4J5	L0L 1L0	P1P 1Z3	P1H 1K1	L4R 1X8	L3V 4S8
705-721-7520	705-445-0804	705-458-1103	705-684-9090	705-789-8813	705-526-9324	705-325-9565
FAX: 705-721-1495	FAX: 705-445-6498	FAX: 705-458-0105	FAX: 705-684-9887	FAX: 705-789-7245	FAX: 705-526-1513	FAX: 705-325-2091

Your Health Connection

We anticipate that on occasion there will be a student or staff member who is confirmed to have COVID-19. When that occurs, SMDHU will be made aware and will require the individual to isolate themselves at home, and will promptly follow up with their contacts for whom additional precautions are needed.

Group settings with smaller numbers of children (e.g. child care, day camps) have operated safely in Simcoe Muskoka with similar precautions in place over the summer, with no outbreaks in these settings to date.

If there are indicators of increased COVID-19 circulating in the local community or in Ontario, there will be provincial and/or local discussions to change course as needed. School boards and public health will do our best to keep you informed as these decisions are considered.

Most people will recover without help if they get COVID-19. The people at increased risk for severe outcomes are those who are over 70, or have chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or cancer. These people (including you) may need extra protection if you are living together in the same household. If there is a medically fragile person in the household and you are sending your child to school, you can lower the risk of infection by having a family isolation plan to keep sick children away from the vulnerable person in your house, and reducing the exposure of vulnerable people in your household to other social networks that could expose them to disease.

Unfortunately we have to weigh competing risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. You consider these risks daily as you make decisions about attending workplaces, dining out or socializing with friends or family. There is no perfect answer. Sending your child to school may slightly increase the risk of getting COVID-19. Keeping your kids at home may increase the risk of interrupting their social and developmental well-being. This is a changing situation and the decision you made might need to change later. Whatever decision you made, we will continue to work together to help your children learn safely. By following public health measures and keeping your children home when they are ill, you will be helping to limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools. For more information please visit the Return to School section of our COVID-19 website.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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