



# SPECIAL STATEMENT FROM

SIMCOE MUSKOKA DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT'S

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH, **DR. CHARLES GARDNER**

December 15, 2020

To all residents of the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka:

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit region is now in the **Red – Control** level under the [Province's COVID-19 Response Framework](#). This took effect at 12:01 a.m. Monday, December 14.

The move to this level signifies the critical situation we are in with the continued swift growth of COVID-19 transmission in Simcoe Muskoka. Our local data shows that COVID-19 cases in our area are at the highest levels to date, confirming the upward surge of this disease. As a result, we must do everything we can to contain its spread. This second wave of transmission threatens our health and lives, and significantly impacts the ability of our healthcare system to manage the increased demands on its services. If we do not curtail the spread of this disease now, the projected growth of the disease in our area over the next few weeks is very grim indeed.

We continue to see transmission due to close and unprotected contact between individuals in both work and social settings, which then spreads easily within households. With the holiday season upon us this route of transmission will only continue to worsen. It is essential to remember that the fewer people you have contact with, the lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Therefore, I am asking all residents of our area to limit your activities and take further restrictive actions immediately:

## **Close Contact, Gatherings and Events**

- Limit close contact to your household only (the people you live with).
- Maintain two metres of physical distancing from everyone else.
- Do not visit any other household or allow visitors in your home.
- Individuals who live alone, including seniors, may consider having exclusive, close contact with another household to help reduce the negative impacts of social isolation.
- Everyone should avoid social gatherings.
- Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household.
- Trips outside of the home should only be for essential reasons (work, school, groceries/pharmacy, health care, assisting vulnerable individuals, or exercise and physical activity).
- Wear a face covering in indoor public spaces, outdoors if physical distancing cannot be maintained, or if wearing one is required.
- Work remotely, where possible.



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## Travelling

- Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others.
- Individuals and families in higher transmission areas should avoid travel to lower transmission areas (i.e. from Red to Orange, from Yellow to Green) except for essential reasons.
- Individuals living away from home, including those studying at colleges and universities, should consider doing a self-quarantine, or drastically reducing close contact with others, 10 to 14 days before returning home for the holidays. This will help lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Individuals and families who consider travelling to another province for essential reasons during the holidays should:
  - o Consider the risk associated with travelling. This includes COVID-19 transmission in the other province, entry requirements (ie. quarantine) of some other provinces, etc.
  - o Self-quarantine, or drastically reduce close contact with others 10 to 14 days before travelling and after returning home. This will help lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
  - o Follow general (Ontario) public health advice, as well as any rules and regulations of the other province.

## General Advice

- Stay home if you have symptoms, even if they are mild.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly.
- Cover your cough.
- Download the [COVID Alert mobile app](#).
- Get tested if you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or if you've been advised of an exposure by the health unit or through the COVID Alert mobile app.

This pandemic continues to challenge us all. Its effects on us – emotionally, physically, socially and financially – are significant. Through my conversations and meetings with local residents, organizational leaders, elected officials, community partners, colleagues, and my own staff, I am deeply aware of how fatigued people are of this pandemic. I know these further restrictions make things even more difficult, particularly during the holiday season. However, there is hope on the horizon with the impending arrival of COVID-19 vaccines. As the health unit prepares, in collaboration with the province and our many local health sector partners, for the largest undertaking of public immunization in recent history, I am confident that with our collective actions now we will be able to slow the spread of COVID-19. This will bode well for all of us for a much brighter 2021.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charles Gardner  
Medical Officer of Health