

December 3, 2021

To businesses, organizations and residents within the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka:

Re: Increasing COVID-19 Transmission in Simcoe Muskoka and Community Efforts to Prevent Spread

On November 23, 2021, I issued two letters of instruction for [businesses and organizations](#) and [recreational fitness and sports](#) to address a rise in COVID-19 cases in Simcoe and Muskoka. These letters contained further actions to help stop the spread of COVID-19. They were targeted to places and settings where our data showed that transmission was happening, such as indoor public spaces and workplaces. While it is too early to know if these additional actions have had an overall effect in reducing COVID-19 in Simcoe and Muskoka, I am thankful to businesses, organizations and the public in adhering to these instructions since they were released. In the meantime, unfortunately, our cases have continued to rise to a current weekly incidence rate of more than 80 cases per 100,000 persons as of December 2, 2021 which represents a doubling over the past four weeks.

This places us among the health units with the highest incidence of COVID-19 in the province, well over the present provincial incidence (which was 36.7 cases per 100,000 population per week from November 21 to 27). The majority of these local cases have been among people who are not fully vaccinated, although there are also cases amongst vaccinated individuals. While the age group with the highest incidence rate of cases is children between 5 to 11 years of age (who have only very recently become eligible for vaccination), the majority of cases are actually occurring among youth and young to middle-aged adults (given that they also have a high incidence and are a larger group than children under 12). We are also seeing a rise in hospital and ICU admissions from COVID-19. This speaks to the importance of all eligible individuals getting fully vaccinated and all residents following the required public health measures, including mask use, distancing, and self-isolation and testing for those with symptoms or who are close contacts of a COVID-19 case.

Along with this rise in community transmission, our data suggests that social gatherings with people outside of one's household members continues to be an important contributor. As of December 1, 2021, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is actively managing 29 outbreaks in our communities and are aware of many other settings in which people may have been potentially exposed to COVID-19, however, the health unit is not able to investigate due to our limited resources and capacity to do so. These outbreaks and exposures in multiple settings and amongst many contacts is straining our community resources, from SMDHU, to primary care, hospitals and our first responders. In some cases, gatherings in private dwellings and functions in public businesses and organizations with members from outside of one's household have been determined to be the source of transmission, even with many of those attending these functions and gatherings being vaccinated. These cases represent both fully, partially and unvaccinated residents which is concerning and provides me with reason to seek further community interventions to help stem the upward rise in our local cases at this time.

Simply stated, help from our community is needed to avoid further restrictions in Simcoe and Muskoka. The collective efforts of the Simcoe and Muskoka community are required to protect each other from COVID-19, and to maintain and support our scarce health and public health resources. This

□ **Barrie:**
15 Sperling Drive
Barrie, ON
L4M 6K9
705-721-7520
FAX: 705-721-1495

□ **Collingwood:**
280 Pretty River Pkwy.
Collingwood, ON
L9Y 4J5
705-445-0804
FAX: 705-445-6498

□ **Cookstown:**
2-25 King Street S.
Cookstown, ON
L0L 1L0
705-458-1103
FAX: 705-458-0105

□ **Gravenhurst:**
2-5 Plineridge Gate
Gravenhurst, ON
P1P 1Z3
705-684-9090
FAX: 705-684-9887

□ **Huntsville:**
34 Chaffey St.
Huntsville, ON
P1H 1K1
705-789-8813
FAX: 705-789-7245

□ **Midland:**
A-925 Hugel Ave.
Midland, ON
L4R 1X8
705-526-9324
FAX: 705-526-1513

□ **Orillia:**
120-169 Front St. S.
Orillia, ON
L3V 4S8
705-325-9565
FAX: 705-325-2091

is particularly important during the holiday season and in the winter months, which is often a time of indoor gatherings and activities. These community and individual efforts include:

- Get vaccinated for whatever dose you are eligible for (first, second or third/booster). Vaccinating as many people as possible will reduce COVID-19 in our community and help us get back to the people and things we love.
- Businesses that host people for holiday celebrations and activities should minimize capacity within indoor settings, given a higher degree of risks (e.g. removing masks for eating and drinking). We recommend limiting indoor capacity to the number of people who can maintain physical distancing of two metres.
- Businesses and organizations should host holiday gatherings remotely to avoid larger groups of individuals congregating, that can assist in spreading the virus. While the desire to hold holiday celebrations remains strong given the collective stress we have all been experiencing, the risk associated with gatherings at this time remains high and may result in compromising critical operations in your business or organization in the event that staff become ill and must isolate.
- Businesses and organizations are required to enable remote work for workers, where reasonably possible, to reduce the number of workers exposed to the risk of transmission at the organization.
- Members of the public and employees in work settings are required to wear a mask or face covering that covers their mouth, nose and chin during any period when they are in the indoor area of the premises, unless exempt under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* and associated Regulations.
- Individuals attending or hosting a social gathering or event who are NOT fully vaccinated are advised to gather only with those within their household unless physical distancing is practised and/or face coverings are worn.
- Individuals who ARE fully vaccinated are advised to keep gatherings to a small number of people outside of their household, ideally with those who are also vaccinated.

As we continue to monitor the increasing transmission of COVID-19 in Simcoe Muskoka and do all we can to control and reduce its spread, including actively monitoring and preparing for the arrival of the new and possibly more transmissible Omicron variant of concern, I am also considering the potential to require the capacity limits that were lifted by the province in October to be reinstated. However, following the recommendations and requirements provided above will help to reduce the spread of the virus moving forward and hopefully will help to avoid the need to take this undesirable step. I recognize the hardships and fatigue you have all faced during this lengthy pandemic, and I sincerely appreciate the ongoing efforts of the residents, businesses, and organizations in Simcoe and Muskoka in protecting our communities. Together, as in the past, we can stabilize and then reverse our increasing community transmission of COVID-19 and help usher in a safer holiday season ahead for our communities.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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