

COVID-19: Update #25

Revised Local Case & Contact Management Approach, Testing Update, New Masking Recommendations, SMDHU in Red-Control Colour Stage & Regional Legislative Directions

Attention: Physicians, Emergency Departments, Infection Control Practitioners, Occupational Health Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Nurse Practitioners, EMS, Designated Officers, Midwives, Family Health Teams, Pharmacies, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN, Beausoleil First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Rama First Nation, Wahta First Nation, Long-term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Hospices

Date: December 15, 2020

Local Epidemiology & Reporting

Last week, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases reported since the start of the pandemic, at 310 cases, reflecting an incidence of 52.1 cases per 100,000 population for December 6th to 12th. Case counts have been trending upwards since mid-August with average daily growth at 1.8% for the most recent week. Approximately 83% of cases are symptomatic at/around time of testing. It is crucial at this time that everyone try to limit their close social interactions to only their household and limit their activities outside their homes to those that are essential such as work, school, groceries, and medical appointments. The most current case counts for laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases in the SMDHU region are available at [Simcoe Muskoka Health Stats](#) ¹

Revised Case, Contact & Outbreak Management Approach

With the high case counts, often with many identified high-risk contacts (HRCs) and potential exposure locations requiring follow up, SMDHU has had to modify our Case & Contact Management processes to ensure that we can continue to reach new cases as quickly as possible. As such the following measures have been put in place at this time:

- Priority remains reaching confirmed cases within 24-48 hours of lab receipt
 - Cases will receive an abridged case management interview
 - Note: cases will no longer be followed through to clearance from self-isolation by public health. They will be provided a date when they would be cleared at that interview.
 - Cases will be asked to notify their own close contacts based on the criteria of either a) living in the same household or b) having been within 2 metres of the case during the period of communicability for at least 15 minutes cumulatively without both the case and contact wearing a mask (medical or non-medical). The close contact will be asked by case to self-isolate for 14 days from their last exposure and go for a COVID-19 test.
 - Exposure settings and outbreaks are being prioritized based on vulnerability;
 - Patients/staff identified as high-risk contacts through health care setting exposures will be referred to Public Health Ontario's Contact Tracing Program; and
- Cohorts of high-risk contacts (students) who are excluded from school/child care will be notified of their need to self-isolate via communication from public health, in addition to being referred to Public Health Ontario's Contact Tracing Program for follow up.



Additionally, moving forward according to the provincial guidelines, given the increased incidence of COVID-19 in our area, any person who gets tested for any reason, even when asymptomatic including targeted surveillance, and subsequently receives a positive laboratory result will be assumed to have a true positive test and will not be recommended to have a retest.

New Mask Recommendations to Reduce Exposure Risk in Healthcare Settings

On December 1st the province made some significant changes to the [public health case and contact management document](#). One of the significant changes is with regards to the effectiveness of a surgical/procedural mask for the purposes of source control. **A medical mask alone, worn by someone infectious with COVID-19, is now no longer considered to be sufficient source control (preventing enough virus particles from leaving their nose and mouth) to deem persons within 2 metres to be low risk, unless those persons were also wearing a mask (medical or non-medical).** A medical mask remains appropriate, along with eye protection, as minimum personal protective equipment (PPE) for COVID-19.

Therefore, it is now recommended whenever possible, all patients/residents should wear a mask whenever there is anyone within 2 metres of them.

- If the patients/residents are not wearing a mask, and a health care worker (HCW) who is infected with COVID-19 is within 2 metres for at least 15 minutes cumulative time, despite the HCW wearing a medical mask, the exposed patients/residents will be deemed close contacts will have to quarantine (self-isolate) for 14 days.
- Additionally, it will continue to be important for staff to mask universally in non-patient areas (e.g. break rooms) to avoid high risk exposures.

There is no 'absolute protection' scenario of no risk and therefore all other aspects of COVID-19 prevention, included daily screening, hand hygiene, testing and physical distancing are very important in preventing transmission. As COVID-19 prevalence is at its highest now, everyone should be extra vigilant in the prescribed COVID precautions, especially given that the asymptomatic person next to them may be infected and infectious.

New Testing Options

Ontario has ID NOW rapid testing units which are currently being deployed throughout the province to hospitals and assessment centres in rural and remote communities, as well as to test people as part of early outbreak investigations in hotspot regions where there are high concentrations of COVID-19 cases. Hospitals will be able to test people, such as staff and patients, who are either symptomatic or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and have quick access to a preliminary result. At this time, Orillia Soldiers Memorial Hospital is the only hospital in our jurisdiction with these testing units. These are all still being validated so people require two swabs (one rapid and one sent for lab testing). The focus is currently on testing symptomatic healthcare workers.

The province has also received Panbio rapid antigen tests that will support a screening program for long-term care homes and other workplaces. These tests are for screening purposes not diagnostic. Anyone who screens positive should be referred to an assessment centre to receive a follow up test sent for laboratory confirmation. Anyone who receives a positive screen should self-isolate while waiting for their follow up confirmatory test results. The provincial [COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#)ⁱⁱ was updated on November 20th 2020 with information about these additional testing options.

Testing Related to Travel

As of Friday, December 11th, domestic and international travelers can no longer have provincially funded COVID tests conducted at assessment centres. Travelers are encouraged to seek out fee for service testing options if a COVID test is required for travel.

Simcoe Muskoka Now in Red – Control in the Ontario COVID Response Framework

On Monday, December 14th, Simcoe Muskoka was moved into the Red-Control level by the provincial government in an effort to slow the transmission of COVID-19 in our region. See the [Province's COVID-19 response framework: keeping Ontario safe and open](#)ⁱⁱⁱ for more information on what this means for specific sectors.

In red – control, the general public is advised that:

- 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)
- families should not visit any other household or allow visitors in their homes – people who live alone can gather with one household
- everyone should avoid social gatherings
- employees should work remotely, where possible

Update: HPPA Orders and Letters of Instruction

In the past few weeks, the Medical Officer of Health has issued the following direction to specific sectors:

- Long-term care homes were [ordered](#)^{iv} under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O., 1990, c.H.7*, to limit visitors and reduce temporary absences from their facilities. While the current red-control provincial requirements are aligned with this order, when the region returns to orange, yellow or green, this order will remain in effect until such time it is rescinded.
- Businesses and organizations were [directed](#)^v under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, R.S.O., 2020, c.17* to implement various prevention measures in their settings.
- The [class order for self-isolation](#)^{vi} issued to all persons living or present in the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka on October 6, 2020, remains in effect until such time it is rescinded.

ⁱ <https://www.simcoemuskokahealthstats.org/topics/infectious-diseases/a-h/covid-19>

ⁱⁱ http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_testing_guidance.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-response-framework-keeping-ontario-safe-and-open>

^{iv} <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/docs/default-source/COVID-/201103-class-order-s-22-smdhu-ltchomefinal.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

^v https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/docs/default-source/COVID-Reopen_Operate_Businesses/instructions_re_workplaces_updated_final.pdf?sfvrsn=4

^{vi} <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/docs/default-source/COVID-/class-order-s-22-smdhu-final.pdf?sfvrsn=0>