

COVID-19: Update #23

Increase in Cases and Community Transmission

Recommendation to the Public to Decrease Non-essential Social Interactions and Gatherings

School COVID-19 Update: First Confirmed Case in a School

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: September 16, 2020

Increase in Cases and Updated Local Recommendations to the Public

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) has been monitoring a steady increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the last few weeks. Of note, there was a sharp increase of 32 new cases from September 6 to September 12, 2020 which is a 70% increase above what was reported the previous week. Many cases are the result of high-risk close contact with confirmed cases within a household. We are also observing an element of community transmission as demonstrated by the lack of known risk factors in initial household cases.

Given the increasing number of cases, likely in part from the increase in close social interactions, SMDHU is recommending that the public decrease their non-essential social interactions and gatherings outside of their household. As well, the public should stay vigilant in the use of physical distancing and masks/face covering outside of their household, even within their social circle/bubble. The percent positivity rate of COVID tests is currently 0.2% locally vs 0.7% provincially.

First Confirmed Case in a School in Simcoe Muskoka

SMDHU received notification yesterday (September 15, 2020) of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 related to a school in our region, specifically in a staff member at Twin Lakes Secondary School in Orillia. Initial investigation has indicated that the staff person contracted the virus in the community and not at the school. **The staff person was wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) including a surgical mask and face shield and consistently maintained physical distance while at the school. As a result, there is no increased risk to students and other staff. The cohorts that this teacher worked with have not been directed to self-isolate or seek testing at this time.** As per our usual public health messaging, all staff and students should self-monitor for symptoms and, should they develop symptoms, seek testing and self-isolate until they receive their test results.

SMDHU performs a complete risk assessment for each school-associated case and provides specific recommendations for each scenario hence, the Twin Lakes case recommendation. In most scenarios, when there is a student with confirmed COVID-19, the student's class/cohort would be asked to quarantine for 14 days from last exposure and recommended for testing. Generally, interactions in a classroom setting among students do not meet the minimum requirements for adequate physical distancing, and face coverings - unlike medical-grade surgical/procedural masks - play a role but are not considered adequate PPE.



School Specific Self-Assessment Tool Now Available

The Ministry of Health now has a [school specific daily self-assessment tool](#) available on their website for students, parents and staff. SMDHU is currently revising the screening tool PDF on our website to align with the provincial tool. We anticipate the SMDHU screening tool will be re-posted in the “Families” section of our COVID-19 website by noon tomorrow.

Any student or staff who does not pass the screen is to do the following, unless directed otherwise by SMDHU:

- Contact their school to them know of their screen result
- Self-isolate and not leave home except to get tested or for a medical emergency
- Seek testing
- Continue to self-isolate until they receive their results

If someone feels that their/their child’s symptoms are related to something other than COVID-19, they can seek assessment from their health care provider (HCP). If they follow up with their HCP and an alternative diagnosis is provided, the student/staff can return to school 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved. If the alternative diagnosis is clearly non-infectious, the student does not need to wait 24 hrs. for symptom resolution to return to school.

If a symptomatic person is tested and their results are negative, they can return to school 24 hours after their symptoms resolve, presuming they have not otherwise been instructed to self-isolate (e.g. close contact of a case). Note: Mild symptoms known to persist in young children (e.g., runny nose) may be ongoing at the time of their return to school if other symptoms have resolved and there is a negative test.

Resources for Parents

As the school year progresses, SMDHU will continue to update the information contained on our website to support parents and families, including fact sheets on what to do if symptoms develop, FAQs, and more. Families should be encouraged to visit: <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19/Return-to-School/Families> and to check back often for updated information.

Household Contacts of those with Symptoms

The revised Ministry of Health school specific daily self-assessment tool does not speak to self-isolation recommendations for household contacts of symptomatic students or staff. As per a September 4 update of our previous HealthFax, any household members of the ill individual are to [self-monitor](#)ⁱ for 14 days (i.e. no longer required to self-isolate/quarantine). These household contacts can continue to go to school and work as long as they have not developed symptoms themselves and their ill household member has not been diagnosed with COVID-19. There is potential that this guidance could change again in the future depending on current levels of COVID-19 transmission.

The Ministry of Health school outbreak management guidance document indicates that medical notes or proof of negative tests should not be required for staff or students to return to school after an illness.

There are a number of other resources and documents available through our Health Professional Portal at www.smdhu.org/hpportal as well as through [Public Health Ontario](#)ⁱⁱ and the [Government of Ontario](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-self-monitor.pdf?la=en>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx.