

Spread Joy not COVID this Holiday Season

A joint message from Public Health, Hospitals, First Nations and Municipal Leaders

As the Medical Officer of Health, First Nations Chiefs, CEO's of your local hospitals and Municipal Leaders, we remain united in our commitment and determination to limit the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities. With the holiday season approaching, we invite you to join us as we reaffirm our commitment to limit the spread and be vigilant with our actions throughout the season.

We remain grateful for the ongoing sacrifices made by our community members. So much has changed over this past year – the world around us, our neighborhoods, gathering spaces, work life, the places we call home and the way we stay connected with our friends, coworkers, loved ones and family. Throughout these challenging times, our community members have come together to support one another and have shown kindness. You have shown that together we are stronger. As we continue to practice physical distancing and remain physically apart, the PHU region has shown that we can still come together to support and protect one another.

We cannot wait for more cases, for larger outbreaks, for devastating outcomes or loss. Every community member in every community across the region needs to act as though exposure is possible and probable, every day, regardless of the number of cases. We must act now to ensure that our hospital, public health, and other health care services are available for all health emergencies, and to protect our most vulnerable community members. We have always shown great resilience in the north, and this is an important time in the pandemic. This is our opportunity to save lives.

GATHERINGS

As of Saturday, December 26, 2020 at 12:01 a.m., indoor organized public events and social gatherings with others outside your household will not be allowed. Do not visit others in their home or allow visitors in your home. Individuals who live alone and single parents may consider choosing one household with whom they can visit to reduce the negative impact of social isolation.

Please limit close contact to your household. While provincial gathering guidelines allow up to 10 people indoors, and 25 outdoors, in person gatherings of any size should be avoided. Reduce the number of people you have close social interactions with as this will help reduce your risk. Individuals infected with COVID-19, are contagious up to 2 days before showing symptoms. By reducing your close contacts even when you feel well you can be protecting loved ones.

Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to visit or recognize occasions with people outside your household. If you are over the age of 70, are immunocompromised or have an underlying medical condition, consider participating virtually, or not attending the gathering because of the increased risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

While we recommend you stick with your household, if you are thinking about spending time with people you do not live with, please be COVID-safe:

- Complete the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#) prior to attending or hosting any gatherings.
- Stay home if you have symptoms, even if they are mild. Self-isolate and call your local COVID-19 Assessment Centre.
- Gatherings should be kept as small as possible (must be under 10) and outdoors when possible.
- Set up your space to allow for physical distancing, such as arranging seating in advance to appropriately space household groups.
- Maintain physical distance of at least two metres, whether indoors or outdoors.
- Encourage the use of masks and hand sanitizer.
- Avoid buffet style food service.

For specific recommendations for holiday activities, please visit the [Porcupine Health Unit Website](#).

TRAVEL

Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the Porcupine Health Unit area, it is strongly recommended that you avoid non-essential travel outside of Northern Ontario and to areas with a higher number of cases.

Travel outside the PHU during the shutdown should be limited to only essential purposes.

If you do choose to travel for essential reasons during the holidays, consider self-isolation or reducing close contact with others 10-14 days before travelling and after returning home.

Travel outside the province should be limited to only essential purposes. If you do leave the province during the Shutdown, you should self-isolate for 14 days when you return to Ontario.

Individuals and families should refrain from travelling internationally over the holiday period. If you are required to travel, you will need to meet legal [quarantine](#) requirements upon your return to Canada.

STUDENTS

Individuals living away from home, including those studying at colleges and universities may be considering returning to our area for the holidays. If you are coming home for the holidays, consider self-isolating or reducing close contact with others, 10-14 days prior to coming home. If you are unable to reduce close-contact or complete the self-isolation period, once you get home consider limiting close contact with others, especially seniors and individuals who are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions. Continue to self-monitor for symptoms throughout your visit, and self-isolate if you develop any symptoms.

International students who travel home will need to quarantine, upon their return to Canada.

WORKPLACES

It is strongly recommended that workplaces do not have in-person holiday gatherings or events. These events are particularly high risk, especially in settings where masks or face coverings may be removed to eat or drink. Across the province, COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks commonly occur during regular break and lunch times and would be a risk at these types of events. Virtual gatherings or events are the safest way to celebrate the holidays with your co-workers this season.

PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

Everyone has a role to play to reduce the risk. Community members are advised to continue to:

- Screen regularly for symptoms.
- Stay home and self-isolate if you have any symptoms, even if they are mild. Call the COVID-19 Assessment Center for testing.
- Limit close contact with people you do not live with, keep 2 metres apart and wear a mask or face covering if distancing is not possible.
- Wear a face covering or mask indoors in public spaces.
- Wear a mask or face covering both indoors and outdoors, anytime you are with people from outside of your immediate household and cannot maintain 2 metres of distance.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces.
- Avoid non-essential travel outside of Northern Ontario and to areas of high transmission.

SELF-SCREENING, SYMPTOMS AND TESTING

- Monitor daily for symptoms and complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment.
- Typical symptoms include fever, new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, loss of sense of smell or taste, sore throat/hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing, runny nose or nasal congestion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain.
- Atypical symptoms include unexplained fatigue or malaise, muscle aches, delirium, unexplained or increased number of falls, acute functional decline, exacerbation of chronic conditions, chills, headaches, croup, or conjunctivitis.
- Anyone with symptoms should stay home, self-isolate and call their local [COVID-19 Assessment centre](#)

Many COVID-19 infections may be mild in nature, however, getting tested and staying home can prevent someone at greater risk for severe infections or tragic outcomes from getting COVID. Please stay home, please get tested, please protect one another.

COVID-19 ALERT APP

Get the COVID-19 Alert (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covidalert>) to receive a phone notification if you may have been exposed to COVID-19 and let others know if you test positive without sharing any personal information.

The choices we make today, throughout the holiday season, and in the future, will help keep our communities safe. We want to thank our community members, organizations and businesses for taking COVID-safe actions. As always, we ask everyone to be COVID-kind. Practise kindness, patience, and gratitude. Together, our actions can make a difference. Find ways to celebrate the holidays safely, spread joy and not COVID.

More information about COVID-19 can be found on the Porcupine Health Unit's [website at phu.fyi/coronavirus](#). Visit [Ontario's website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

Sincerely:

Lianne Catton, Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
Porcupine Health Unit

Mayor Cheryl T. Fort
Township of Hornepayne

Mayor Dave Plourde
Town of Kapuskasing

Mayor Denis Clement
Town of Cochrane

Mayor Denis Dorval
Township of Opatatika

Mayor George Pirie
Town of Timmins

Mayor Gilles Laderoute
Township of Black River - Matheson

Mayor Johanne Baril
Township of Val Rita-Harty

Mayor Madeleine Tremblay
Township of Fauquier and Strickland

Mayor Marc Dupuis
Township of Mattice Val-Cote

Mayor Michel Arsenault
Town of Smooth Rock Falls

Mayor Nicole Fortier Levesque
Township of Moonbeam

Mayor Pat Britton
Town of Iroquois Falls

Mayor Roger Sigouin
Town of Hearst

Mayor Wayne Taipale
Town of Moosonee

Chief David Nakogee
Attawapiskat First Nation

Chief Leo Friday
Kashechewan First Nation

Chief Mervin Cheechoo
Moose Cree First Nation

Chief Bruce Archibald
Taykwa Tagamou (New Post)

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler
Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Grand Chief Jonathon Solomon
Mushkegowuk Council

Heather Jaremy-Berube, Chief Executive Officer
Hornepayne Community Hospital

Paul Chatelain, Chief Executive Officer
MICs Group of Health Services

Liza Fortier, Chief Executive Officer
Notre Dame Hospital

France Dallaire, Chief Executive Officer
Sensenbrenner Hospital

Samantha Hiebert, Chief Executive Officer
Smooth Rock Falls Hospital

Kate Fyfe, Chief Executive Officer
Timmins and District Hospital

Lynne Innes, President/Chief Executive Officer
Weeneebayko Area Health Authority