

December 14, 2020

To parents and guardians in Simcoe Muskoka:

COVID-19 continues to spread throughout Simcoe Muskoka. Recently, we have seen situations in which school-age children are getting COVID-19 at home (from family or close friends), in the community (through sports, and social gatherings such as parties, etc.), or at work (part-time jobs). Many students believe that the friends they go to school with are in their “bubble” and thus safe, however this is not true. Children and youth are getting COVID-19 from such contacts; therefore I recommend that all people, including children and youth maintain a distance of 2 metres with those outside of their household contacts. I recognize that this will not be maintained within school cohorts (classes), however beyond these, I continue to advise maintaining physical distance (and use of face-coverings when this is not possible, or in indoor public and work places).

At school, many public health measures have been put in place to prevent the spread of illness. These include daily screening, masks, physical distancing, cohorting, frequent cleaning and disinfection. Thanks to these measures, we have seen quite a limited spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Outside of school, many young people are having close contact with others without following public health guidelines that protect their health and the health of others. I know the actions needed to stop the spread of COVID-19 can be very hard and your child may feel a loss of their independence, privacy and social connection. However, as we get closer to the holiday season when students will have more free time and may want to socialize more with their friends, I am calling on all parents to continue helping your child to take actions that reduce their risk of getting COVID-19. These actions include:

- **Share information** about the pandemic in a calm way to help ease their concerns. Discuss facts about COVID-19 and correct misinformation when you hear it. Help them look up **reliable** sources for updates, like the [Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).
- **Talk about how the actions they take to protect their health** (ie. wearing a mask, staying 2 metres from friends and others outside of their household, not having friends over) are important for their family, their friends and the whole community to stay healthy.
- **Talk about the [symptoms](#) of COVID-19** and ask them to pay attention to how they are feeling (using the [COVID-19 Student Screening Tool](#)) before they go to school; if they have even one symptom they should follow the guidance in the tool, which may include staying home and [self-isolating](#).
- **Limit their close contacts** (the people they can hug and touch and spend time with, without physical distancing and mask use) to only the people they live with. If your child or teen is spending time with friends outside of school (on breaks, after school, or on weekends), remind them to wear a mask, stay 2 metres from their friends (and others outside of their household) and wash their hands often. Outdoor visits are the lowest risk.

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- **Remind them to avoid indoor gatherings** with friends, and if outside, keep the number of people small. Keep an eye on the restrictions on social gatherings and update your child or teen when or if these change.
- **Recommend that your teen download** the [COVID Alert mobile app](#) on their cell phone.

I realize that parents are juggling a lot right now between work, your child's schooling (in-class and/or virtual) and responsibilities at home. I want to thank you for all that you do to keep your family, and in turn our community, as healthy as possible. Your continued support and encouragement can make a big difference in helping your child protect themselves, their friends, family, coworkers, school community and broader community, and help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Visit the health unit's website for more information and regular updates about COVID-19 at <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19> or call Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.

Best wishes during this holiday season.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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