

Media Release

This Spring Break, Do Your Part: Stop the Surge **March 29, 2021** - For immediate release

As we approach the Easter holiday and spring break, the northern Medical Officers of Health are asking all community members in northern Ontario to work together to prevent another surge in COVID-19.

In many parts of northern Ontario, COVID-19 infection rates have been at some of the highest levels since the pandemic began. COVID-19 activity is rising again across the province, and the rapid spread of variants of concern (VOCs) is causing aggressive outbreaks, and in some cases, more severe illness, even in younger people.

We know that everyone has made tremendous sacrifices for over a year. And there is ongoing hope, as more vaccine becomes available, week by week. At this very moment in time, however, the vast majority of our community members are not yet immunized. This means risky activities like gatherings and travel must still be avoided by all.

To protect the most vulnerable in our communities, and to stop the surge from overwhelming our local hospitals and frontline health care workers, we are calling on all northern Ontarians to each do our part to keep our families and communities safe. And we ask everyone to do this with the spirit of kindness and perseverance that has been such a tremendous and vital part of our northern communities' response to the pandemic.

Top 3 Actions for All Families and Households

1. Stay 2 metres apart from anyone you don't live with.

- Staying connected is important for wellbeing. The safest ways to connect are by phone or online.
- Being outdoors is less risky than indoors, and everyone should still be 2 metres apart.
- Closed, indoor spaces are risky. Keep time spent indoors brief, and stay masked and distanced at all times. In the grey-lockdown zone, it is illegal to gather indoors with anyone you do not live with.
- Avoid gatherings, shared meals or carools outside your household - these are common ways that COVID-19 spreads from one family to another. A person infected with COVID-19 can spread the virus to others 48 hours before they even feel sick.

2. Have symptoms? Get tested straight away, and until you have results, you and everyone else you live with must stay home.

- Because the variants spread so aggressively, when one person in the home is sick, the entire household must stay home until test results are available.
- Mild symptoms, even a runny nose can be COVID-19. Only testing can tell.
- Do not go to work or school, or visit anyone if you have symptoms.

3. Avoid non-essential travel or receiving visitors, especially between different colour zones.

- Postpone non-essential trips to avoid the risk of exposure.
- For essential trips, such as for work or medical care, plan ahead. If possible, stay in accommodations where you have a separate bedroom and bathroom. Wear a mask and stay distanced from others at all times.
- If a student is returning home from college or university, plan ahead. Avoid risky close contact exposures 14 days before travel. Postpone travel if sick. In case of a need to quarantine or isolate

because of exposure or illness, arrange a safe space to do so, ideally with a separate bedroom and bathroom.

Top 3 Outbreak Prevention Tips for Local Businesses

1. Follow the regulations of your local zone and stay as contactless as possible.

- As much you can, make customer interactions contactless, and work from home virtually.
- Use PPE (medical mask + face shield or eye protection), and wear masks properly to cover your nose, mouth and chin, when providing services to unmasked customers within 2 metres. Restaurants, bars, gyms, and personal service settings like barber shops or hair salons are all common places where customers are not masked when receiving services.

2. Keep your guard up, even on breaks: stay distanced and masked in break rooms, staff areas, and carpools.

- Because coworkers are familiar with one another, it's easy to let your guard down during breaks. Many workplace outbreaks have happened when people shared meals together, or didn't stay masked and distanced while taking breaks or carpooling.

3. Screen everyone. Every day.

- Daily symptom screening helps remind people who are sick to stay home, whether they are customers or employees.
- As much as you can, have supportive workplace policies that allow people to take sick time.

-30-

Media Contact:

Ryan Peters
Communications Manager
705-647-4305, Ext. 2250
petersr@timiskaminghu.com