

**To:** Municipal CAO's and Mayors/Reeves  
**From:** Dr. Paula Stewart, Medical Officer of Health  
**Re:** Community Response to COVID-19  
**Date:** March 19, 2020

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### **Message from Dr. Teresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer**

Dr. Tam gave the following update to the country on March 16, 2020. "We are in a fairly critical period. The rate of infection in Canada is increasing and the effort to slow the spread of the virus to give health systems a fighting chance to be able to treat it must be heightened immediately. Canadians should not gather in groups ...and should stay home entirely as much as possible".

The approach Dr. Tam is talking about is called "flattening the curve". This means that we slow down the transmission of the virus among people so that there are fewer cases at a time. This will ensure the health care system will be able to cope with people who become very ill and require hospitalization. About 15% of those who become ill with COVID-19 will have severe disease requiring hospitalization. People at highest risk of severe disease are older and have chronic disease like heart disease or diabetes.

### **Current Situation in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark**

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit is monitoring what is happening with respect to COVID-19 in our community, surrounding communities, provincially, nationally and internationally. As the situation changes, you can find up to date information about Ontario on the [Ontario Ministry of Health website](#), and about Leeds, Grenville and Lanark on our website.

Across Canada most lab confirmed cases have been linked to international travel including the USA. This is why all returning travellers have been asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

As of March 19, 2020 areas surrounding Leeds, Grenville and Lanark (Ottawa, Cornwall and Kingston) have reported lab confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection in their communities. The presence of the virus in these communities, and in the States to the south, increases the risk that someone could bring the virus in to our communities. Early symptoms are mild so people may not realize they have the virus. While we don't have any lab confirmed cases yet, we need to act as if COVID-19 could be in our communities.

The COVID-19 virus is spread through droplets from a cough or sneeze that can travel about 6 feet, and can survive for some time on hard surfaces, so it is essential that everyone practices good respiratory etiquette, frequently washes common surfaces, and practices social distancing (see [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org)) to decrease the risk of spread of the virus on our communities. Practicing social distancing means, for example, not having a few friends over for dinner or not taking your kids to a play date.

Given people with underlying medical conditions, older people and those with a compromised immune system, are at greater risk for developing serious complications from COVID-19 including death, it is absolutely vital that we all do our part right now to keep our communities safe.

## **Provincial COVID-19 Strategy**

The overall provincial strategy to prevent and manage COVID-19 is to:

- Monitor COVID-19 locally, provincially, nationally and internationally;
- Review research evidence to understand more about COVID-19;
- Provide accurate information to the public on COVID-19;
- Promote respiratory precautions, staying home when sick and regular cleaning of frequently used services;
- Promoting social distancing for everyone requires specific actions outlined in Premier Ford's Emergency Declaration <https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2020/03/ontario-enacts-declaration-of-emergency-to-protect-the-public.html>;
- Provide telephone assessment and guidance for individuals through Telehealth;
- Test people at high risk for COVID-19 when supplies are available; and
- Provide health services for individuals who are ill with COVID-19.

## **Public Health Unit Role**

The Public Health Unit's role is as follows:

- Provide information to the public:
  - Health Unit Website <https://healthunit.org/coronavirus/>. We update our website daily and appreciate any feedback on whether it meets your needs;
  - Daily social media posts ( [www.facebook.com/LGLHealthUnit](http://www.facebook.com/LGLHealthUnit), [www.twitter.com/LGLHealthUnit](http://www.twitter.com/LGLHealthUnit));
  - Media releases and interviews, and
  - Public consultation with public health nurses by phone.
- Conduct case and contact follow-up.
- Enforce provincial Emergency Measures.
- Provide consultation to health care providers.
- Work with our local health care providers, including EMS, to be prepared and ready to respond to the presence of the novel coronavirus now called COVID-19 virus in our community.
- Provide consultation and support to Boards of Education, community organizations, and municipalities on request.

## **Municipal Response**

Municipalities are encouraged to contact me directly with any questions about the COVID-19 response at paula.stewart@healthunit.org. You are important leaders in your community and if there is something I can do to help your municipality, please let me know.

I have been very impressed with the current action by municipalities to help our community respond to the risk of COVID-19 with municipal social distancing measures.

I met with the United Counties Community Emergency Management Coordinators (CEMC) Table on March 16, 2020 and am meeting with the Lanark County CEMC Table on March 26, 2020 to provide information and discuss what municipalities are doing for COVID-19.

Many municipalities are opening their EOC's to assist in the municipal response for COVID-19. The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit will not be able to participate in person for each one. Either myself, Teresa Clow, or Jane Lyster will work hard to make ourselves available to participate by phone for at least part of the EOC meeting. Please continue to send me the notices of the meetings and we will decide who is able to participate, and share that with you.

We are encouraging municipalities to sign up to receive our media releases. We had ten more municipalities sign up after our memo this week. This will ensure you are aware of any changes in the current situation.

Doug Malanka, Board of Health Chair and Mayor of Augusta Township, suggests the following for municipalities:

- Provide link to the Health Unit website on municipal websites so the public knows where to access information;
- Consider closing or limiting access to the general population to municipal offices and buildings;
- Consider cancelling or limiting Council and committee meetings and events; and
- Consider taking measures to ensure the health and safety of Municipal workers is protected and workers can continue to deliver essential services to the public.