

# Huron Perth Public Health Facebook Live

## June 18

Thursday, June 18, 2020 | 3 p.m.

### Introduction

Alright everybody, it's Dr. Miriam Klassen and this is the Facebook Live chat with Huron Perth Public Health for June 18 that was rescheduled from 11 o'clock this morning till 3 p.m. and we'll start in one minute.

Alright, well good afternoon everyone its 3 o'clock by my clock so I think we'll get started. This is the June 18 Facebook Live with Huron Perth Public Health - The New Normal: Staying Safe in Our Community. First of all, I want to apologize for the technical issues we had this morning at 11 a.m. I've often said that I'm not very technically savvy and I proved that this morning but thank you for your patience and joining us now.

I'm Dr. Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health for Huron Perth. It's been almost five months since Ontario confirmed its first case of COVID-19. It's been just over three months since the province issued a Declaration of Emergency in response to COVID-19 outbreak closing down non-essential businesses and limiting organized public events and social gatherings.

The residents of Huron Perth along with the rest of the province have made extraordinary sacrifices during this time. The people of Huron Perth have understood the risks and worked hard to protect our seniors, people with immunocompromised conditions as well as our healthcare system. Now we're getting to the point where the economic and social impacts of the actions we've taken must also be taken into consideration and wade against the risk of infection which has decreased considerably.

But even as services and businesses reopen, and as we form social circles, it's important to remember that things will not go back to how they were before COVID-19. We're in a new normal, kindness and understanding will be vital to moving safely into our new normal. We must work together to stay healthy while resuming our businesses, services and activities in a new way.

I know there are a lot of questions about how to do this and I will answer as many as possible. If I don't get to your question today, my staff are monitoring and may provide you a response online. We will also be sharing important links so please keep an eye on the comments section. Please note that we will be recording the event so that you can re-watch it later and share it with any friends you think maybe interested. As I mentioned, technology is not my strong suit

so thank you for your patience as I've hit a few technical bumps and it's always appreciated. I'd like to start by answering some questions that we've already received. This first section is around facemasks.

## Topics

### Facemasks

#### **We've had many questions and comments on the use of masks and whether Huron Perth Public Health with require people to wear masks?**

So let me start by saying, I know that masks are a hot topic right now and there are strong views being expressed. And I want to start by saying that as a Public Health Practitioner I work according to scientific principles and use an evidence based approach. It's important then to begin by saying that all science is incomplete. Our understanding of the world, including our understanding of mask use during COVID-19 has evolved over time and will continue to evolve as more evidence becomes available.

And then I want to pause here for a moment to talk about evidence. It can be very difficult to sift through all the reports and studies and claims. It's helpful to consider that even these studies need to be critically examined.

Often research starts with case studies that spark someone's attention. I'm imagining that some years ago, some body probably observed that they had 2 or 3 patients with lung cancer, which was once a relatively rare condition, and that all those patients were smokers. That in itself was not proof that smoking caused lung cancer but it was an interesting observation and it would have been worth additional study to examine that issue. And I think we all know how that one turned out.

Sometimes observations are made at a population level and these can also identify associations that are of great interest and that we want to follow-up with more research but we must be careful to remember that association does not equal causation. My favourite example to illustrate is this. Research shows that as ice cream consumption goes up so do drownings. But does that mean that ice cream causes drowning? Of course not. In this example, there's a third factor that we have not yet discussed – warm weather. When the weather is warm, there are more people swimming as well as eating ice cream and so more drownings. So the ice cream and drowning is a spurious association.

The best evidence comes from so called randomized double blinded control trials. These are what we really want if we could. As an example, if we wanted to test that a new drug clears a rash, we find a group of people who all have the same rash condition, based on agreed upon criteria, and we give half the new drug and half the placebo and neither the physicians who provide the drug nor the patients know whether they are receiving the actual drug or the placebo. And then we follow-up and access the results. You might be amazed as I always am at

how strong the placebo effect can be but that's another whole topic. The point is that this kind of study is not always available or even possible or ethical.

Nonetheless, good evidence comes from repeated and repeatable observations about cause and effect and not just one study. And with all that being said, with the context in Huron Perth and the evidence that I have seen so far about masks for general use in the public, the evidence does not meet the threshold for me to make an order for the general public to wear masks. I would refer you to the Public Health Ontario review called [COVID-19 What We Know So Far About...Wearing Masks in Public](#), for those of you who might be interested in reading more.

#### HPPH recommendations on mask use

There is certainly evidence that masks act as source control when worn by people with respiratory symptoms and masks might also provide such a benefit when worn by people without symptoms. However, there are also potential adverse impacts such as self-contamination. With all that in mind, non-medical masks are recommended when maintaining a two metre distance may not be feasible. Such as indoor public spaces like stores and businesses around Huron Perth.

By wearing a mask, you and I are helping protect those around us from our own germs in the event we are unknowingly incubating and transmitting COVID-19 because masks may be an effective barrier. Please check out our website to better understand how to use masks properly or else we risk contaminating ourselves.

Most importantly, masks are not a substitute for the other public health measures that include frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing. We must all continue to do those public health measures even when wearing a mask so that we don't bring COVID-19 into our social circles.

Let's remember that not everyone can wear a mask for a variety of reasons however, each of us can contribute to keeping our community safe and well by doing our part. Measures such as staying home when ill, frequent hand hygiene, maintaining the physical distancing, minimizing social interactions, helping our neighbours and friends, staying calm and kind and wearing a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge is a way to protect others.

For those of us who can wear a mask, it's a way to be kind and to protect your community. We want to see as many people as possible wearing masks in situations where physical distancing is a challenge such as public indoor spaces. Some services and retail establishments currently require you to wear a mask in order to receive services or shop in their stores; please follow these requirements.

I also wanted to add that Huron Perth Public Health would like to recognize the hard work of individuals and community groups across Huron Perth who've been making non-medical face coverings. Wearing masks will likely become part of our new normal and the efforts of these individuals and groups is greatly appreciated.

## Social circles and gatherings

As you've likely heard, the province is encouraging Ontarians to create Social Circles. A social circle is a group of up to 10 friends and family who can interact without physical distancing. Think of your social circle as the people you can hug and touch or those who can become part of your daily and weekly routines.

Social circles are an important way to reduce social isolation and support the mental health and wellbeing of Ontarians at this time while still allowing any cases of COVID-19 to be tracked quickly. We can trace and isolate COVID-19 quickly and effectively when you limit the number of people you come into close contact with.

Note that anyone in your household is already part of your social circle which will affect how many more people you can add to a social circle. You cannot be part of more than one social circle. Think about this carefully because everyone in that social circle must commit to one another to protect each another by respecting that social circle.

The province offers information on [Create a social circle during COVID-19](#). Please review the information and make an informed decision on whether you'd like to or able to form a social circle and how you will maintain it.

### **What is the difference between a social circle and the limit on gatherings?**

The rules for social circles are different from the proposed expansion of social gatherings from 5 to 10 people.

Social gatherings can be any 10 people from outside your household but physical distancing of at least 2 metres should be maintained. For example, the expansion of social gatherings enables individuals and families to enjoy the company of others at backyard barbecues and picnics at neighbourhood parks while respecting physical distancing.

On the other hand, social circles enable Ontarians to enjoy close contact with members of their circle. This could include hugging, carpooling, enjoying a patio and sharing a meal without staying two metres apart.

Ontarians should avoid close contact with anyone outside of their social circle if they are unable to maintain physical distancing. Social circles will also bring back supports from people outside of their household who can now help with children, seniors or those in need.

### **Premier Ford has said we can hug our family. What does this mean for compromised people like myself?**

Yes, part of being a social circle means being able to hug however, there are considerations before you create or add people to a social circle.

People may or may not choose to participate in a social circle depending on their unique circumstance and risk of developing complications from COVID-19. For example people over 70, people with compromised immune systems, people with underlying medical conditions.

Remember that your social circle can include fewer than 10 people and it's always best to start slow and safely add more members later. I heard someone talking this morning encouraging grandparents to accept hugs of their legs from grandchildren than necessarily having your faces close together.

### **Can you eat on the patio with someone outside your social circle if you sit six feet apart?**

It is permissible to meet with others outside your social circle if you can maintain a safe physical distance in groups of no more than 10.

So, each outdoor space needs to be considered individually. Can you stay physically distant? I'm asking people to be mindful of your choices. The more people with which you interact, the greater the risk of COVID-19 transmission. We all want to protect our social circles so we need to be careful with our other choices. Can we minimize trips to the grocery store and hardware store? When we socialize with people beyond our social circle of 10, are we taking all the necessary steps to keep safe? Might it be safest for everyone to bring their own picnic food to such a picnic?

Most importantly, we must all continue to stay home when we're ill and get tested if we're ill, clean our hands frequently and keep our two metre distance when we're out and about. I'm encouraging people not to get too hung up on technical details but think about the principles.

The principles remain that you have an inner social group whom you hug and eat and carpool and you want to protect everyone within that group and be very careful about not putting those people at risk with the choices you make outside of the social circle or your inner social group.

### **Are we safe to have people in our pool?**

COVID-19 does not appear to transmit via pools and hot tubs based on CDC guidance but please be mindful of the province's emergency orders limiting gatherings to 10 people as well as your own social circle.

### [Testing](#)

#### **I live in Huron County and can now visit my mom in a senior's residence. Where do I get the required COVID-19 test?**

First of all, it's great news that you can now visit your beloved seniors that we can all do that in long term care homes and retirement homes but there are a lot of guidelines around that. Not every home will necessarily be ready around the same time so it would be good to reach out to the home and see if you need to book an appointment, how prepared they are.

One of the requirements is that the visitor must attest to home staff that the visitor has tested negative for COVID-19 within the previous two weeks and subsequently not tested positive. The home is not responsible for providing the testing so who provides the testing? Please contact your health care provider who will let you know how that happens in Huron Perth. If you do not have a health care provider you can contact Huron Perth Public Health.

The way we have organized testing in Huron Perth continues to evolve so it's important to check our website frequently and to check with your health care provider first because the location and times of various testing centres does change.

A reminder that testing continues to be available for:

- all people with at least one symptom of COVID-19 even for mild symptoms
- people who are concerned they've been exposed to COVID-19 and this includes people who are contacts of confirmed or suspect cases
- people who are at risk of exposure to COVID-19 through their employment like essential workers such as those who work in grocery stores, food processing plants and health care workers.

To get tested, complete the online tool [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) or call your local health care provider. If you don't have a family doctor contact Huron Perth Public Health, 1-888-221-2133 extension 3267 and have your health card number ready. Once you have been assessed, an appointment will be made at a testing centre convenient for you and we're lucky in Huron Perth, there are testing centres spread out.

If you are calling your local health care provider after hours, please follow their instructions. If you have called Huron Perth Public Health after 4 p.m. we will call you back the next day even on weekends although we are looking at over the summer with the decreased number of cases, possibly cutting back some of our weekend hours but we will let you know.

If you are experiencing worsening illness or symptoms it's better to call your local emergency department. Remember the COVID-19 test result is a snapshot in time meaning the results are really only valid the date the test was taken. A negative test today does not rule out the possibility of a positive test result in the future. If you develop symptoms after a negative test you should be tested again. If you have developed symptoms from the time you took the test till the time you received the result please stay home self-isolate and be assessed again for possibly another test. Anyone who is symptomatic should not be going out and about.

### [Website reporting](#)

**Why is the total number of people being tested and the total number of tests performed in Huron Perth no longer being published? Why are negative results no longer being published?**

The reason is Huron Perth Public Health is aligning with public health across the province and returning to our usual practise of not reporting on our website the number of people who

received tests or test negative. COVID-19 is a reportable disease and our mandate is to follow-up on every positive, not negative usually.

Initially it was important and helpful to know everyone being tested and we could ask them to self-isolate and initiate contact tracing right away and so that we could get a better understanding on how the epidemic was progressing in Huron Perth and in Ontario. But now we have a much greater understanding of COVID-19 and transmission in Ontario and also many many people are being tested, many of them asymptomatic and the rate of positive results is very low so that was a lot of resource we were spending on negative results and now in Phase 2 it's time for us to put those resources back to other public health work such as inspecting restaurants, splash pads, personal service settings as those open.

For the same reason, instead of generating our own number of total tests and reporting that on every day we will be reporting the provinces estimate of the total number of tests taken in Huron and Perth counties from lab data. This number will include a small number of repeat tests on the same individual.

We will of course continue to report positive results including demographics such as age, gender and municipality. As well, we will no longer be updating the numbers on the webpage COVID-19 in Huron and Perth on weekends. We will revisit this in the event of an increase in the community transmission and cases.

**If we have a COVID-19 test can there be false positives if you had COVID-19 in the past?**

Yes you can. That is why in general, we don't recommend retesting people who've had a positive test. In terms of deciding when someone is no longer infectious, that's a clinical decision based on symptoms and based on the length of time from when the initial test was done and public health will guide you through that.

What we know is that some people continue to shed what's called shedding virus for weeks or even months after they're no longer infectious and that that virus is dead. So when we do studies, looking at if that virus is live and can be grown, it's not. There are some rare times when retesting is recommended and that guidance will come from public health advice or from your family doctor or other clinician but for more people retesting is not necessary.

**If I am going to be tested every two weeks so that I can visit my Mom at a long term care home...do I need referral for each test?**

That's a great question. That guidance was just recently shared and so Ontario Health and all the players involved in testing in Huron Perth haven't had a chance to get completely organized yet but I can tell you that I was in on a discussion this morning where they were talking about how to make this testing process work as smoothly as possible and that's a really good point

that I will bring to the next such meeting that maybe some people should have a standing referral or appointment for that kind of a test as long as this requirement is in place so thanks for that question.

## Conclusion

That's it for all the questions that I'm seeing, thank you very much for your questions and your time. I hope you have found this information helpful. Adjusting to our new normal will require politeness, kindness and patience from everyone but we must continue to work together to stay healthy while resuming our businesses, services and activities in a new way. We have come through so much together and I know that this understanding and kindness will help us get through the next phase.

I encourage you to follow our website, [hpph.ca/coronavirus](http://hpph.ca/coronavirus) for more information as it becomes available. We also have our Health Line phone intake line available at 1-888-221-2133 extension 3267. Thank you very much everyone and I think that's it for now.

## One last question

### **Test results are taking days to a week. How can that work for long term care visits?**

Some of the test results are taking a long time. What we are doing right now is we're prioritizing test results for people that are symptomatic, sick, where the information might impact their care and treatment so there are certain priority populations and some of the test results are taking longer to turn around in the less high priority groups but again I can tell you there are regular meetings and people working on those systems. Ontario was initially doing 1,000 tests a day, it is now doing 25,000 tests a day and so we continue to work on that improvement and hopefully you will see that turnaround time becomes quick. Sometimes it is very fast now and hopefully it will be consistent as well.

That's it for today. Thanks everybody and have a good week. Bye bye.