

May 13 FB Live: Transcript

Introduction

[Dr. Klassen checks with communications staff to ensure the technology is working]

Hello everyone, I'm Dr. Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health for Huron Perth. Thank you very much for joining me again as we talk about COVID-19 in our community and with a particular focus on spring and summer activities.

[Dr. Klassen notices feedback, checks with communications staff to eliminate feedback.]

As our positive case count in Huron Perth continues to hold steady, and the province is gradually making plans to reopen, we want to answer any questions you may have about what life will look like as the weather warms up and we move through spring and into summer.

I'm looking forward to your questions and 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.

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 may be interested.

(As I've mentioned, technology is not my strong suit so thank you for your patience as I've hit a few technical bumps and that is appreciated.)

I'd like to start by answering some questions that we have already received through Facebook related to spring and summer activities:

Questions

Roadside firewood sales

Roadside firewood sales. They have groups of less than 5 that prep the wood, and do not "man" the station that it sells at. People give money and take wood, based on the honour system. May they continue?

It sounds like this practice is fine to continue and does not violate any emergency orders or public health recommendations. It is important that the people that prepare the wood practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene and it is preferable not to handle money. So, it's better that the correct change or money is put in based on the honour system.

Private yard sales

"Can I do a private yard sale if I promote physical distancing" / Our town always has a day for garage sales end of May, do you think they should postpone?

Garage or yard sales represent a health and safety risk to the public, are a non-essential service and contradict several of the public health recommendations, including physical distancing

requirements. Additionally, garage sales deal with cash handling, the touching and handling of used goods and provide an opportunity for surface disease transfer.

At this time, garage and yard sales are strongly discouraged, and if more than 5 people are present would be prohibited. Under the emergency orders issued by the Government of Ontario, there can be no public or social gatherings of more than five people.

- I also encourage you to review advice from your local municipality.
 - Many municipalities have prohibited yard/garage sales. Check your local municipality's website for information.
- If you choose to sell online, practice physical distancing.
 - Use contactless payments like e-transfers rather than cash or cheques.
 - Offer no-contact pick up or drop off, such as curbside or doorstep.
 - If you can't offer a total no-contact, be sure to keep 2 metres between yourself and the other person. Do not invite anyone into your home and do not proceed with transaction if either person is ill.
- Clean and disinfect regularly
 - Ensure items are cleaned and disinfected
 - Wash your hands with soap and water often, especially before and after handling any items involved in the sale.

Marinas and boat ramps

“What is the plan for opening boat ramps? Great way to stay away from people and stay sane when on the water. Is there a transcript of the questions and answers available? Stay Safe!”

I'm not sure about the second part of that question, but

I agree – being outdoors and on the water are great activities for our mental health. The Province of Ontario will be deciding when marinas and boat ramps can open as part of its recovery plan.

On May 1, the province announced that marinas may also begin preparations for the recreational boating season by servicing boats and other watercraft and placing boats in the water, but not open to the public. Boats and watercraft must be secured to a dock in the marina until public access is allowed.

Continue to check with your local municipality and marina for the latest guidelines.

Fireworks displays

“Will communities be able to hold fireworks displays?”

At this time, gatherings of more than 5 people are still prohibited, and visiting between households is also discouraged, so community fireworks displays are not likely to happen in the near future.

Campgrounds

“Any idea when campgrounds may open for weekend camping? As long as social distancing is done and all trailers have their own washrooms I think it could be safe. Public washrooms, playgrounds and rec centres could stay closed for now!”

On May 9, the provincial government announced that provincial parks and conservation reserves would be open by May 15 for limited day-use access. Recreational activities will be limited to walking, hiking, biking and birdwatching. Camping is not permitted at any provincial park or conservation area at this time. The Province of Ontario is continuing to roll out its recovery plan with careful consideration to protecting the public's health and safety along the way, but it is difficult to predict exactly when campsites will be open to the public again.

Please check the latest information regarding your local conservation area or provincial park.

Hand hygiene when parks and playgrounds open

“What should we do other than hand hygiene once the parks and playgrounds start opening again?”

I think the most important piece of advice is to stay home when you're ill and keep your children home when they're ill. If you become ill when you're out, cover your cough or sneeze into your sleeve or Kleenex and head home. If you're out in parks and playgrounds once that is permitted, limit gatherings to no more than 5, maintain a 2 metre distance between you and anyone who is not in your household and wash your hands when you get home.

Recreational sports and activities

Do you think we will have any recreational sport/activities this summer, and if so, what steps do you think should be implemented? Thanks in advance.” / Sports leagues this summer...yay or nay?

It's too soon for me to say. I've learned not to speculate. It is hard to envision how sports leagues can happen as long as gatherings and are prohibited. However, family and household members can play games outside such as Frisbee or basketball.

Testing well water

“Can I still send in well water samples? Where do I pick up bottles and drop them off?”

Well water testing is still available but the service has been modified during the Health Unit's pandemic response. Well water sample bottles can be picked up and dropped off at the main Huron Perth Public Health offices in Stratford and Clinton.

in Stratford: 653 West Gore Street (outside of the main entrance, Mon-Thurs 8:30am-4:30pm; Fri 8:30am-11:30am)

In Clinton: 77722B London Rd (outside of the main entrance, Mon-Thurs 8:30am-4:30pm)

It is recommended that you test your well water a minimum of three times a year – preferably spring, summer and fall. Samples must be tested within 48 hours of collection. Take the sample just before you deliver it to the Health Unit. Ensure all forms are filled out as instructed.

Tick collection and identification

“Will ticks still be collected and identified this summer?”

HPPH will continue to accept ticks and tick inquiries this summer. We encourage the public to call ahead and speak to a public health inspector as our offices are still currently closed to the public. You can call ahead and make arrangements.

Beach water testing

“Will you be testing beach water?”

Yes. We are currently planning for the 2020 sampling season and anticipate that beach water quality testing will continue to occur this summer and that will be important if and when beaches open.

Backyard pools

“How much of a risk are chlorinated family backyard pools? Especially surrounding transmission of infectious disease shared among people from different households.”

According to the CDC, there is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas, or water play areas. Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water.

However, families should be the only ones using their backyard pool as it's still the law that you cannot gather with more than 5 people (except immediate family members in a household) and gatherings between households are not recommended yet.

Wearing face masks

“Will the wearing of face masks be required or encouraged? If so, can the public be advised where to get one?”

Right now, the Ministry of Health is recommending that where physical distancing is a challenge or impossible, you can consider wearing a fabric mask. I understand there are many local groups sewing masks, such as Stratford and Perth Caremongers, and you can also find out more through the United Way Facebook Group – Help is Close to Home. It's important that surgical masks continue to be prioritized for healthcare workers. I can tell you that the public health measures table at the provincial level is currently reviewing all the evidence to date and will provide the most up to date evidence-based recommendations regarding masks. There is some research that shows that wearing masks in public maybe a helpful thing, there is also some evidence that wearing a mask can be a problem.

Wearing a mask out in public or the workplace would be worn for source control which means they'd be worn to protect others from potential infectious droplets of the wearer. And as I said

earlier non-medical masks (cloth masks) are preferred for source control due to current shortages in medical masks.

Masking may lead to more hand/face contact, so masks can also be a source of contamination, so it's important to wash hands or clean hands with alcohol-based hand rubs, perform frequently immediately after touching and handling the mask. Some people may not tolerate masks, they may have asthma or eczema that make wearing a mask difficult or uncomfortable and there are some jobs too where other PPE is required where wearing a mask would not be suitable. So as I said, in terms of source control to protect others where the 2 metre distance cannot be maintained, cloth masks can be considered. And, keep an eye out because public health measures tables is reviewing all the evidence and may provide updated guidance.

Mosquitoes and COVID-19

“Can mosquitoes transmit COVID-19?”

To date there has been no information nor evidence to suggest that COVID-19 could be transmitted by mosquitoes.

As a reminder, COVID-19 for the most part is a respiratory virus. It is most commonly spread from an infected person through:

- respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands has also been a way of spread
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands

Getting infected with COVID-19 through ticks should also not concern us. However, mosquitoes can transmit West Nile virus and ticks can transmit Lyme disease so we still need to protect ourselves from getting bitten by these vectors and to protect ourselves against these other diseases that are still a risk in the summer.

Warm weather, UV light and COVID-19

“Will COVID-19 die out in the warmer weather?”

The virus has spread to countries with hot and humid weather, and cold and dry climates. You can catch COVID-19, no matter how sunny or hot the weather is. There is no evidence that the virus will die out in warm weather nor reason to believe that cold weather can kill COVID-19. Pandemics don't necessarily behave in the same way as seasonal illnesses such as influenza.

Regarding UV light killing COVID-19

Exposing yourself to the sun or to temperatures higher than 25 degree Cs does not prevent the virus. Ultra-violet (UV) lamps should not be used to disinfect hands or other areas of your skin. UV radiation can cause skin irritation and damage your eyes.

Trailer parks

I live in a trailer park. For some of us this is our full-time/permanent home. We also have seasonal residents who use their trailer as their cottage. We do NOT have any temporary or transient or rental units in this park. Can my weekending/seasonal neighbours come if they choose as long as we all social distance?

At this time, the province's recommendation for seasonal residents is that if you don't need to go, then please do not go. It is recognized that there maybe limited essential reasons to go, however the recommendation is based on concerns about spreading COVID-19, as well as a strain on healthcare services including the ability of people in remote locations to receive timely medical care should they fall ill. There's also concern for local supply of things like groceries and medication. If someone chooses to go to their cottage or seasonal residence despite the request to not do so, they need to ensure to follow public health measure, including purchasing food and medication in their own community before arriving at their cottage and limiting their visits in local community for essential shopping only. Physical distancing of at least 2 metres from other people, staying at the cottage or trailer as much as possible, practicing proper hand washing and cough hygiene including frequent handwashing and self-isolating if they develop symptoms.

Emergency orders have been extended until June 2, these orders prohibit gatherings of more than 5 people unless they're all from the same household. So, owners of cottages and other seasonal residences are asked to follow these recommendations and orders until the rate of COVID-19 transmission is truly under control and sufficiently low not to pose these hazards.

Farmer's and outdoor markets

“Will farmers' & outdoor markets resume? Are there any special precautions I need to take when/if I visit them?”

Yes, farmer's markets have been deemed essential and are being allowed to resume operations under strict guidance of public health and for purveying food only (no crafts or gifts). Public health is working with each market to make sure they have the necessary protocols in place to operate safely and protect everyone's health. When you are visiting, make sure that you:

- Do not visit if you are sick
- Practice physical distancing at all times – maintain a 2m distance between yourself and other shoppers and vendors
- Please wash your hands before you begin shopping and again if you handle cash, cough, sneeze, blow your nose or touch your face.
- Try to make your purchases as quickly as possible and then leave.
- Do not touch the products - ask the vendor to chose them and package them for you.

And, I'd like to point out that not every farmers' markets have chosen to open. There are municipalities and locations where they have decided not to open.

Testing with mild symptoms

“When will testing be available for people with milder symptoms?”

In our southwest region the testing policy advisory council has now determined that there is new capacity to test some people with new onset symptoms consistent with COVID-19 that aren't so ill that they require hospitalization and they don't necessarily have to be in one of the priority populations. So, if you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, please call your family doctor. If you don't have a family doctor, you can call HPPH and you will be assessed and if indicated for you to be tested, you will be referred to a testing collection centre.

Those are the questions we received ahead of time, and now I'll have a look and see if there are any questions that came in during this that I can also answer.

Negative test, but still unwell

“If you have a negative test, but are still feeling unwell, should you still self isolate or can you go for a drive in the car, not getting out, with your partner?”

Best thing to do is discuss this with your family doctor. If you don't have a family doctor, call public health. If you're not feeling well, the best advice is to stay home. If you have a negative COVID-19 test, it's possible sometimes that it's a false negative, so your family doctor may discuss your symptoms with you and may decide to re-test, but also will be able to give you advice about whether your symptoms sound infectious and you should stay home, or when you can go out and drive in the car.

Gathering in groups more than 5

“When can we expand our bubble?”

We haven't received any guidance about that yet, but I do know that other provinces are using language around expanding bubbles where 2 households can start to interact with each other. We haven't receive any direction like that yet in Ontario, however we are showing a nice trend, a very gradual downward trend, so it does appear that our measures are working and hopefully we'll be able to expand the people that we interact with in safe ways soon, so stay tuned. Hopefully the province will provide us with more direction.

Public basketball courts, tennis courts, etc.

“Is it prohibited to make use of public basketball courts, tennis courts, etc.?”

If it's part of a public park, they are generally closed, except to walk through, to get some outdoor exercise. So, at this time gatherings of more than 5 are prohibited and in general, public areas like parks are closed except for walking.

Conclusion

So. I think that's it for all the questions that I am seeing.

Thank you very much for your questions and your time. I hope you have found this information helpful. The news from the province this week about community spread seems hopeful and that is in part thanks to the work you all have done and continue to do. I also commend the work done by our local healthcare providers in hospitals and primary care and long-term care, as well as the compassion and support that the larger community is showing to them. I've been so warmed by that. We will get through this together. I think I said near the beginning of this that we are in for a marathon not a sprint and it's already been a long and it's working but we need to keep at it.

I encourage you to follow our website 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 ext. 3267.

Thank you very much and I think that's it for now. Bye everybody.