

Facebook Live Update | Masks & staying safe in our community

Thursday, July 16, 2020 | 2:15 p.m.

Introduction

Hi everyone. I'm Dr. Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health for Huron Perth Public Health. Thank you for joining me today. The next little while will bring some changes to Huron Perth and 23 other regions in Ontario as we move into Stage 3 tomorrow.

In Stage 3, more restrictions will be loosened and nearly all businesses and public spaces will reopen as long as they follow the public health advice and workplace safety guidance necessary to keep everyone as safe as possible. The limits on gathering sizes will also change. Indoor gatherings are now limited to a maximum of 50 people as long as within that indoor space you can maintain the physical distancing. Outdoor gatherings are now limited to a maximum of 100 people or less, again given that the space allows for the appropriate physical distancing.

Social circles however, should continue to be kept at 10 people province-wide regardless of the stage. So, even those of us moving forward into Stage 3, you still have your social circle of 10 to whom you have to try and be really true.

Also, I have issued instructions to employers and businesses in Huron and Perth requiring all owners and operators of indoor commercial and indoor public spaces to have policies in place requiring the use of face coverings in their establishments.

I know there are a lot of questions about face coverings and these instructions and I'll answer as many as possible during our time together today. If I don't get to your questions 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 comment section and you can find all of this information at www.hpph.ca/masks. Please subscribe to the page or check back often because we are updating the page regularly.

Please also note we will be recording this Facebook Live event so you can rewatch 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 if I hit a few more, it is appreciated. I'd like to start by answering some of the common questions that we've received.

Face coverings

[Are masks mandatory?](#)

Well, I want to start by saying that there have been a couple of different approaches across the province. Medical Officers of Health are making decisions that they feel are best for their communities given their rates of transmission and other factors such as density of population.

Some Medical Officers of Health have used a Section 22 Order to make masks mandatory. I have chosen not to go that route; instead I have chosen the approach which is also being used in many parts of the province which instruct owner and operators of businesses and organizations to have policies in place that require people visiting their establishments to wear a face covering. I'll talk more about the difference in a few minutes.

The instructions I have issued to such owner/operators means that as an owner/operator of an establishment as well as public transit, those owner/operators must have policies in place that require people visiting their business to wear a face covering.

As a visitor to an establishment, you are expected to wear a face covering when you are inside the establishment or on public transit. The face covering must cover your nose, mouth and chin without gapping.

Some people cannot wear a mask for various reasons and they are exempt from wearing a face covering and furthermore, proof of exemption is not required and should never be asked for by owner/operators or other visitor.

I'll add masks are not a substitute for the other public health measures. Measures such as staying home when ill, frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing. We must all continue to do these fundamental public health measures even when wearing a mask so that we don't bring COVID-19 into our social circles and into our community.

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; these are the fundamental public health measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. Masks are an additional layer of protection and one that will be particularly useful as we enter Stage 3 and increase the number of people who can gather and the number of businesses, services and activities that are open. Increased interactions among people means increased risk of spreading the virus.

[What is your evidence supporting this decision?](#)

There is accumulating epidemiologic evidence and epidemiologic has to do with comparing large populations so in this case large populations that are using masks and populations that are not. There is such evidence that the wide spread use of face coverings by all persons

decreases the spread of respiratory droplets and expert opinion supports the wide spread use of face coverings to decrease the transmission of COVID-19.

I would point to the World Health Organization's "Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19" as well there is "Physical distancing, face masks and eye protection to prevent person to person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 a systematic review and meta-analysis" and that's in The Lancet and Public Health Ontario's "2019 Novel Coronavirus What we know so far about wearing masks in public" which was updated on June 17, 2020. My staff will share all of these links in the comments section.

So, while the evidence is not strong enough for me to issue a Section 22 Order in our context in Huron Perth, the evidence is such that it is strongly recommended as an additional layer to prevent community transmission. (Community transmission means the spread of illness for which the source of the infection is unknown for example no known contact with a confirmed case) and we know that there have been reports of people before they develop symptoms or perhaps never developing symptoms who are capable of transmitting the virus inadvertently and that's how it can sometimes spread in a community undetected for a little while.

So we want to see as many people as possible take this additional action to support our community efforts to keep Huron Perth safe. This is an added tool as we reopen and increase interactions between people. Controlling community transmission will be important as we look towards even more reopenings and in particular here I'm thinking about schools. One of the main things we can do to support our schools in opening safely is to keep our community transmission as low as possible.

Are masks safe to wear?

Many people safely wear masks in different environments such as healthcare for prolonged periods of time. Remember, you're only required to wear a mask when you're inside indoor settings where the public interact. It is important to put masks on and take them off correctly without contaminating our own masks with our own hands so we do have information on our website about how to do that.

Why are you issuing these instructions now when before you didn't want to require masks?

At our last Facebook Live, I did say that masks would be part of the new normal and that we are constantly monitoring the research of masks and transmission of COVID-19 and are always prepared to respond as necessary. It's been said that all science is incomplete. So the evidence to support the use of cloth face coverings in the community as source protection for COVID-19 has evolved and expert opinion now recommends such a policy.

We knew Stage 3 would be happening at some point and that with the increased openings and larger groups allowed, there would be more interactions between more people. This means the risk of virus spread is increased. Normalizing the use of masks helps reduce this risk and helps keep businesses and services up and running.

We've all seen in the news how quickly the virus can spread when communities reopen more businesses and services even after rates have dropped and the level of transmission appears to be under control. As I said earlier, keeping rates low will also be the best way to support our schools in opening and operating safely. The lower the community transmission the safer it will be for our schools.

I did previously say I was not prepared to issue a Section 22 Order on the use of masks and these instructions are not a Section 22 instead I have issued instructions to operators under the authority of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

So what's the difference? Let me start by saying that Medical Officers of Health have the responsibility and the authority to stop the spread of infectious diseases in our community. Under Section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act a Medical Officer of Health can issue an order to require a person to take or to refrain from taking any action in respect to the communicable disease where the requirements specified in the order are necessary in order to decrease or eliminate the risk to health presented by the communicable disease. Section 22 orders are often reserved for issues relating to quarantine and isolation of individuals or to remediating or disinfecting specific settings and otherwise decreasing risk in specific settings in the context of particular outbreaks or other identifiable health risks.

Section 22s are generally reserved for serious infection control issues where other approaches have not been successful. I would reserve a Section 22 such as serious high risk issues and that is still an option that is open.

The Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act has already been used to impose infection control measures such as the 2 metre distancing and the hand hygiene that you see so widespread throughout our community. It can be used to require mandatory masks particularly as the province permits gradual reopening of various sectors of the economy.

My staff will add a link in the comments so you can see O. Reg. 364/20: Rules for areas in Stage 3 which is a regulation under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act and it says in there the person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall operate the business or organization in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials, including any advice, recommendations or instructions on physical distancing, cleaning or disinfecting. That is where I am gaining my authority to issue these instructions.

It is not feasible to enforce these instructions strictly and that is not the intent. The goal here is to increase mask use among those of us that are able. The instructions will be reviewed

regularly as new evidence becomes available and in accordance with our local and regional epidemiology. Additionally, Huron Perth Public Health will monitor the impacts of these instructions.

What I'm hoping to see is that with the reminders, the education that the wearing of masks becomes normalized and those of us who are able to wear masks do so. I do it for you, you do it for me.

What establishments are included in these instructions?

Establishments in these instructions are premises that are openly accessible to members of the public and are used for the purposes of offering goods or services to members of the public including but not limited to a mall or other structure containing business or organization premises.

The areas of an establishment that are subject to the face covering requirements are any areas in which visitors interact with one another or with staff members or any areas that are open or accessible to members of the public. Areas of an establishment that are not subject to the face covering requirement are areas that are outside and areas that are not open or accessible to members of the public.

Employees are not required to wear masks under these instructions if they are in an area of the establishment where the public does not have access and they can maintain a 2 metre distance from other workers or they are protected from interactions with the public by a suitable barrier such as impermeable plexiglass.

Face coverings are required in these premises:

- arcades and other indoor amusement facilities
- buses and bus shelters
- hotels and motels (and I'm talking here about the common areas like lobbies not the rented rooms)
- indoor areas of food premises (with the exceptions of patrons consuming food and drink so when you are seated at your table you're not required to wear a face covering)
- indoor areas of fitness centres
- gyms and recreational and sports facilities
- indoor concert venues
- theatres and cinemas
- laundromats
- lobby areas of commercial buildings
- municipal buildings
- museums
- galleries
- historic sites

- personal service settings
- places of worship
- professional services such as counselling
- personal care
- funeral homes
- repair and rental services
- stores and shopping malls
- taxis, limousines, rideshare vehicles

What establishments are not included in the instructions?

The following establishments are exempt and some of them have their own legislation that guides how they operate their premises and with schools in particular there is still some provincial direction pending.

At this time:

- Daycares
- Schools
- post secondary institutions and other facilities used solely for educational purposes
- school transportation vehicles
- hospitals and portions of buildings used by regulated health professionals
- buildings and services owned or operated by the province of Ontario or the Federal Government of Canada
- portions of community centres/arenas or other buildings that are being used for the purpose of providing day camps for children or for the training of amateur/professional athletes
- portions of community centres/arenas or other buildings owned and operated by the municipality used for the purposes of providing community services or programs for which registration or pre booking for a group is required.

What do the instructions require owners/operators to do?

These instructions require owners/operators to make their best efforts to require people entering their business to wear face coverings. There is no requirement for a business to supply face coverings however, doing so maybe appreciated by their customers.

Owner/operators are also required to implement screening practises for employees and members of the public. Screening and be active asking questions and/or passive signage. For employees, screening is best completed prior to reporting to work. For members of the public, signage at all entrances can be used to inform visitors of the protocols during this phase of

reopening public buildings including that people with symptoms of COVID-19 or who've been asked to self-isolate because of exposure or travel are asked not to enter the premises and signage that indicates that the Medical Officer of Health has required that everyone wear a face mask.

Examples of the passive screening signage can be found on the Huron Perth Public Health and Ministry of Health's websites. Owner/operators must also ensure alcohol based hand rub is available at all entrances and exists for the use of all persons entering or exiting the premises if a sink is not available.

What does best efforts mean?

Best efforts means signage at the entry informing visitors of the requirements to wear masks as per the Medical Officer of Health's instructions. If greeting visitors at the door, give a verbal reminder that the visitor should be wearing a face covering if they can. Give a verbal reminder to visitors who remove their face covering for extended periods of time but please note there is not a need for the business to turn away the customer to achieve the best efforts standard.

Are there exemptions?

The following people are exempt from wearing a mask or face covering under the instructions:

- children under the age of 2 years
- children who cannot understand the need for a mask, refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver
- a person who is unable to put on or remove their face covering without assistance
- a person whose breathing would be inhibited in anyway but wearing a face covering
- a person for any other physical or mental health medical reason cannot safely wear a face covering which can include but is not limited to people with certain types of respiratory disease, cognitive difficulties, difficulties in hearing or sensory processing disorders or anxiety.

Additionally, a person for whom a religious reason prevents them from wearing a face covering that is compliant with the definition of face coverings in these instructions is exempt. And note that a person means any customer, patron, employee or visitor who enters the premises.

Should I send an employee home if they cannot wear a mask?

Our instructions do not require or recommend that employers send employees home that are not able to wear a mask. Please follow applicable HR policies as well as labour and employment legislation.

How is this being enforced?

As I said, we are expecting operators of an establishment to use their best efforts to implement their face covering policies. This means that signs and verbal reminders are used but there is not a requirement that a business turn away the customer. These instructions are to be enacted and enforced in good faith and primarily should be used as a means to educate people on the importance and value of face covering use in enclosed spaces during this COVID pandemic.

Again, it would not be feasible to enforce these instructions strictly and that is not the intent. The goal is to increase mask use among those of us who are able. We want to create an environment where we are all reminded about the importance of face masks and encourage to do our best to wear one when we enter indoor public spaces where the risk of transmission is higher.

I really want to encourage everyone to be kind, be patient and respectful to one another. Be kind, be patient to our owner/operators with the owner/operators who are doing their best to implement my instructions. Be kind, be patient with the patrons who are doing their best to comply. Be kind, be patient with the people who cannot wear a face covering. Navigating this pandemic is our individual and our shared responsibility and these instructions count on everyone's best intentions.

Who can I call to complain if I see someone not wearing a mask?

Calling in complaints is not necessary. We've provided information to owners and operators regarding this policy including exemptions. We ask everyone to be kind and understanding when others can't wear masks and to physically distance from them. Please note the instructions are not a Section 22 Order making masks mandatory for everybody, they are a good faith requirement for those of us that can wear masks.

The use of masks or face coverings in establishments is an additional public health measure on top of physical distancing, hand hygiene, cough hygiene, staying home when sick and minimizing our social contacts so still being choosy about how often we choose to go out and interact with other people. These are the things that will help prevent the spread of COVID-19 within our community.

Where can I get masks?

Non-medical masks are available at a variety of price points. United Way Perth Huron has compiled a list of where to find masks in Perth and Huron counties and encourages those who have difficulty with the cost to apply to their Urgent Needs Fund. Individuals can also call 2-1-1 or visit www.211ontario.ca to access this information. We are working with community

partners to increase availability of reusable cloth masks for those who can't access them for whatever reason.

Do people need to wear masks during athletic or fitness activity in indoor facilities?

Temporary removal of the mask is permitted where necessary for the purposes of receiving services or while actively engaged in athletic or fitness activity. I would encourage you, if you can keep it on, if you are doing a lower aerobic activity and you're not in the pool, it's still a good idea.

What is an acceptable barrier?

A reminder, an outdoor drive through or patio or walk-up window are outdoor areas, masks are recommended there but are not required. Barriers should be an impermeable material. If you are indoors and you can remain behind a barrier except for your hands, below face level if there is a need to exchange goods, then a mask is not required but it is still recommended.

Are religious officiants exempt from wearing a mask when leading a ceremony?

The officiant, such as a minister or an imam can choose to wear a mask if standing in an area of the religious space that is separate from the public attending the ceremony. The officiant should use a microphone to project their voice to reduce the risk of respiratory droplets being spread and preferably not participate in singing or chanting. The officiant should stand at least 5 metres from the people attending and if there is more than one officiant they should be spaced at least 2 metres apart from each other and not be facing each other.

Can a congregation in a place of worship sing?

We recommend against congregation's singing and we will refer you to the COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies for further information. It is our recommendation to not participate in singing, it would be safer if it were done outside with more space, and it would be safer when masks are used but we don't really know how much singing contributes to droplet spread so it's hard to give more specific direction at this time.

Limited number of singers

What if there's a limited number of singers at the front of the service – 2-3 people singing physically distanced from each other, do they need to wear masks?

The singers should stand at least 5 metres from the people attending and if there is more than one singer they should be spaced at least 2 metres apart from each other and not be facing each other. A mask is recommended but not required.

Opening up children's rooms, daycares and places of worship?

The provincial COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies advises places of worship to suspend activities that increase risk of disease transmission including regular childcare and children's programming at this time but continue to watch the guidance and we'll let you know if that is updated.

Do people who attend weddings have to wear masks?

Weddings are private events not an event for the public to attend. For private events, we recommend maintaining 2 metre distance between people not in your social circle. Masks are not required but they could still be helpful, people can wear them if they so choose.

The province has announced that as part of Stage 3, people gathering indoors for wedding ceremonies can continue to fill up to 30% of the capacity of the particular room. The new provincial limits on gatherings apply to wedding receptions.

What if I am working at a private event such as wedding if I'm a caterer or a photographer?

Because you're working at the private event, the guidance comes under the workplace guidance, you would need to keep 2 metres from others or wear a mask when you're not able to do that.

Is Huron Perth Public Health reviewing reopening plans?

The provincial government will work with businesses and sectors that are either not able to reopen in stage 3 or who are experiencing significant challenges opening with the restrictions to explore how these organizations could safely resume operations as Ontario gradually reopens while implementing public health and workplace safety measures. Businesses and organizations unable to open or who are facing difficulties in operating under stage 3 may visit www.ontario.ca/reopen to submit a reopening proposal.

How many patrons can a restaurant accept?

The limits on gatherings does not apply to restaurants because they are not an organized public event and or social gathering. Restaurants are permitted to allow the number of patrons that can be safely accommodated. In other words, maintaining the 2 metre distance between table and within the restaurant social circles maybe closer than that.

I'm a childcare provider. Do I have to wear one in my home?

At this time, that is not a publicly accessible space where the public is going, so no.

What if entrance is refused?

What happens when I'm refused entrance because of a medical reason? What can I do – contact the Human Rights Commission? Contact public health? Contact law officers?

It is not our recommendation or requirement to refuse anyone because they can't wear a mask for a medical reason. Again, that's not our recommendation, it's not connected to my instructions.

Does wearing a mask make someone touch their face more than if wearing no mask?

I would say that that's probably true and that's why we all want to make this the new normal of how to use masks safely. That was one of the concerns initially about wearing masks when the level of community transmission was high and we would rather people stay home that it is possible to contaminate oneself from touching a mask. We do have instructions on our website about how to put on a mask safely and take it off safely, clean your hands before and after and we are recommending at this point the reason we are having this requirement is for source protection so I wear the mask to protect you, you wear the mask to protect me.

The benefits of that in the community setting, what the evidence now suggests the benefits outweigh the risks. There are always risks. There are risks to not having a mask policy, there are risks to having a mask policy. In this case, we would like everyone to get used to wearing a mask like people do in certain industries where they have to wear a mask their entire work shift and that is doable.

How long is wearing this mask to be?

We're going to continually re-evaluate the context, we're going to evaluate the amount of community transmission, we're going to evaluate the evidence and continually update our recommendation as is appropriate. I think that's what the question pertains to is how long is the policy in effect? Mr. Ford stated it could be up to a couple of years, well, I think we will need to learn to live with COVID-19 until there is a vaccine in all likelihood. We don't know how soon that will be, hopefully sooner rather than later. Again, it depends what happens if there is a wave 2, if we learn more in the meantime.

At this time, what we want to do is get used to making a mask, making it a part of our new normal to help our community move successfully into stage 3 and stay there without seeing the increase in cases that we've seen in some regions which then require us to roll back some of the openings.

Can they be hand washed and used again?

Cloth ones can, disposable ones cannot. As I mentioned earlier, the United Way will have a link and some information about the types of masks that are out there and hopefully you can find one that works for you.

Someone commented on our new case.

That is correct. We are reporting a new case and that was after a couple of weeks of no new cases. I think it's a reminder to us that this low level community transmission can happen and it can lead to a really sharp increase in cases very quickly given the right circumstances. Because the number of interactions is increasing in stage 3, we expect people to be gathering and interacting more and because we are human and we might forget to maintain our 2 metre distance, we might not recognize mild symptoms, then the masks are an added layer of protection to help guard against those little clusters in outbreaks that we've seen in Ontario and then larger issues we've seen in other countries.

By issuing instructions, does that mean that it is mandatory to wear a mask?

Hopefully, everything I've explained is now clear, it isn't a simple straightforward answer I would agree but this isn't a simple or straightforward issue.

What part of Perth County?

All of Huron and Perth.

If someone is unable to wear a mask due to medical conditions do they require a note?

No. They don't require a note. They don't require any kind of a proof. This is a good faith instruction that we are counting on everyone to do their best.

I think the question is about where the case is.

The new case is in North Perth.

Why is it mandatory to get into a hospital, why is it different for other places?

That is because a hospital comes under separate direct guidance from the Ministry and it's a higher-risk situation. You have higher risk there because you have sick people with

compromised immune systems all together and you have doctors and nurses that we really want to not get sick so that they can keep serving all of us to not get sick. To enter a hospital, it is even more important.

It's unfortunate that during tourist season there is a patchwork of rules being imposed that leads to confusion and frustration.

I can totally appreciate that. That is true in the absence of different central direction. However, each Medical Officer of Health like I mentioned earlier is accountable and responsible for controlling infectious disease in the area that they serve and that is certainly a responsibility that I take very seriously.

There has been a lot of thought and consideration with my team into giving this instruction because I know it's a big change and we are asking people to change a habit. Hopefully with all the supports that we're providing to establishments they'll also be able to help remind all of us to keep wearing our masks when we go out into public spaces.

Can business owners be fined for repeatedly not enforcing the mask policy?

Under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, under that legislation there is the option, there is a fine structure that we can use, that's not something that I anticipate using. It would have to be an extreme violation. What we want to do is all work together to change our habits and make mask wearing the new norm. I know they're not particularly comfortable, I've worn them for big long work shifts as well but you know think about it. If something that we can all do that may save a life. We're all working on this together. Not everyone can do it but a lot of us can and for those of us that can we can help contribute to making our community safer.

Stay safe everyone. Let's show that as Canadians we're still the kindest country going.

Thank you for those comments. That's exactly what we're hoping is that we'd like everyone to be calm and to be kind and to see this as an opportunity to help our community continue to be successful and safe.

Is it acceptable to wear a shield instead of a mask?

For the purposes of these instructions, a shield does not meet the definition of a face covering. The reason is that a face covering for source protection needs to provide covering from the nose, the mouth to the chin fairly snuggly. That is to keep in my droplets right, so it's for source protection. I'm wearing a face shield because I'm assuming that I might be sick even though I'm not showing symptoms and capable of transmitting the virus.

To keep the droplets in you really need to have a face covering that is more like a mask. A face shield in the healthcare system is generally worn the other way around. I'm wearing it as a healthy person together with a mask to protect myself from the droplets of some other sick person so mostly to protect my eyes from the droplet spray. However, there may be some people that cannot wear a mask that can wear a face shield and it's not as good at source protection but it might offer some benefit and if they choose to wear a face shield then that is certainly their choice.

[Someone not wearing a mask and not moving away](#)

We are not yet shopping. There are some belligerent people out there who will refuse anything they deem against their wishes. If I go shopping and someone not wearing a mask won't back away from me when asked, what do I do?

That's very tough. Again, we're asking that everybody implement this in good faith together and where people are not wearing face masks hopefully they are still staying home when they're sick, they're participating in hand hygiene, they're maintaining a 2 metre distance and my best advice to you would be for you to maintain the 2 metre distance, give them the space to get by. We are providing owners/operators with some talking points and some assistance to having these respectful conversations asking people to comply.

[Small worship team asking being able to remove mask for their portion of the service?](#)

I would see that as a kin to the officiant and 1-2 singers, I think one of the key words here is small and that they can keep their 2 metre distance between them and all be facing forward to the participants and at least 5 metres from the participants. That would be the ideal.

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your questions and your time, I hope you found this information helpful. Adjusting to our new normal will require politeness, kindness and patience from everyone. We must continue to work together to stay healthy while resuming our businesses, services and activities in a new way and it's important that we resume them. That's also part of the healthy community.

We've come through so much together and I know with understanding and kindness we will get through this. I encourage you to follow our website www.hpph.ca/coronavirus as it becomes available. We'll also have our Health Line phone intake line available at 1-888-221-2133 extension 3267. Thank you very much and I think that's it for now. Goodbye everybody and have a good day.