

March 13, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Re: COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) School Closures

In response to the impact of COVID-19, the province of Ontario has issued a Ministerial Order to close all publicly funded schools in Ontario for two weeks following March break. This means that Ontario schools are ordered to remain closed from March 14 through to April 5, 2020.

The number of reported COVID-19 cases in Ontario has been increasing this past week, and the move to order schools closed is a public health effort to contain the spread of COVID-19. The next few weeks are critical in terms of slowing the spread of COVID-19, and the province's decision is based on advice from Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and the experts at Ontario's COVID-19 Command Table.

This decision will have a significant impact on families, students, schools, as well as the broader community, but it is a precautionary measure designed to reduce the spread of the virus and keep people safe.

On March 13th Ontario's chief medical officer of health Dr. David Williams has strongly advised the people of Ontario to **avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada**. If you do decide to travel outside of Canada with children, please be advised that due to recent positive cases in young children, **all returning children will be required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days upon return**. The situation is changing rapidly therefore we recommend you visit travel.gc.ca for the latest travel advice. Please frequently consult the [Ontario Ministry of Health](https://www.health.gov.on.ca) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health) to understand recommendations for travelers returning home for affected areas.

Locally, one case of COVID-19 has been reported to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (yesterday, Thursday March 12). The individual is self-isolating and recovering at home. This is the first case of COVID-19 for our region, and given the spread of the virus around the world and within our province, it is likely that we may see more cases. Our focus now is to break the chain of transmission to limit the spread of infection.

We understand that these are worrisome times, however there are simple ways that you can protect yourself and your family over the coming weeks.

We want to remind parents that the best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are the same as preventing the cold and flu. It is important to reassure your children about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them they are safe and there are many things they and the whole family can do to stay healthy, including:

- **Hand washing:** wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Cough/sneeze etiquette:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- **Stay home when sick:** Students/children should tell parents if they are not feeling well, and together make a plan to stay home from community and sporting events and organizations your child may belong to, i.e. Girl Guides, hockey games etc.
- **Keep clean:** Keep hands away from face and mouth unless you have just washed your hands.
- **Stay healthy:** Stay healthy by avoiding contact with sick people, eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, and getting enough sleep.

If you have questions or concerns, please call Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. Health Connection's hours are extended to 9 p.m. Friday night (March 13) and are also extended to Saturday and Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. March 16th – 20th 8:30 a.m. – 8 p.m.

This is an evolving situation and we continue to remind residents of the importance of using credible sources to stay informed. Please check the SMDHU [website](#) for the latest information and instructions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charles Gardner, MOH