

MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH RECOMMEND CAUTION DURING THE HOLIDAYS AS COVID-19 CASE NUMBERS CONTINUE TO CLIMB

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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London, ON – Increasing case numbers and the arrival of the Omicron variant have prompted area Medical Officers of Health to issue a letter outlining recommendations for how residents can protect themselves and their loved ones from COVID-19 during the holidays.

Huron Perth Public Health’s Dr. Miriam Klassen, Southwestern Public Health’s Dr. Joyce Lock and the Middlesex-London Health Unit’s Acting Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Alex Summers issued the joint statement today. The letter does not add restrictions or gathering limits for businesses, restaurants or other establishments to those already put in place by the Provincial Government. However, it does advise individuals of the steps they can take to limit the potential spread of COVID-19 at a critical time, when the number of cases is on the rise and holiday gathering and travel plans are being made.

The joint letter from the Medical Officers of Health recommends the following:

- Everyone should limit indoor social gatherings in private dwellings to no more than 10 people. All attendees 12 years of age and older should be vaccinated.
- All unvaccinated individuals 12 years of age and older should avoid any non-essential indoor contact with individuals who are not part of their household.
- Where possible, individuals should work remotely.

The recommendations come into effect immediately and will be reassessed in four weeks.

In addition to limiting close contact with others, the best way to prevent COVID-19 spread and severe illness from the virus, is to get fully vaccinated. The recommendation for unvaccinated individuals 12 years of age and older is included as the risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection is much higher in unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals compared to vaccinated individuals. While breakthrough cases may occur in vaccinated people, they tend to be milder with a much lower risk of hospitalization, ICU admission and death.

“We know people are tired, but we hope they’ll understand why we’re asking them to take extra steps to prevent further spread, especially as we approach the holidays,” says Dr. Alex Summers, Acting Medical Officer of Health with the Middlesex-London Health Unit. “We know that this means adjusting plans, which is a big ask, but the number of new cases and the arrival of the Omicron variant have shown we can’t let our guard down.”

Adds Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health with Southwestern Public Health, “So many of those from our region have embraced vaccination and the other public health measures we’ve asked of them. This is a reminder that a layered approach is required. We can’t rely on

vaccination alone. As our socializing is primarily happening indoors right now, we need multiple strategies in place at once.”

“We continue to see a steady stream of new cases in Huron-Perth, and many are associated with social gatherings and events,” says Dr. Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health for Huron Perth. “The more contacts you have, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading to you or your loved ones, including the vulnerable. Following these three recommendations will help keep community members as safe as possible during the holiday season and into January.”

In recent weeks, the three health units have seen higher transmission of the virus and COVID-19 outbreaks in multiple settings, including schools, childcare centres, long-term care and retirement homes. The recommendations are intended to lower the number of close contacts between individuals, which previous experience and Science Table modelling have shown can lead to a decrease in case counts.

For more information about COVID-19 and how to protect yourself and your family and friends from the virus, please visit:

Middlesex-London Health Unit: www.healthunit.com/novel-coronavirus

Southwestern Public Health: www.swpublichealth.ca/covid19

Huron Perth Public Health: www.hpph.ca/coronavirus

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