

COVID-19 Public Health Precautions

Extension of Instructions Regarding the Use of Face Coverings/Masks in Enclosed Public Spaces

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On Monday, July 6, 2020, Medical Officers of Health from Eastern Ontario Health Unit; Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit; Renfrew County and District Health and Ottawa Public Health announced a regional approach to the use of face coverings/masks in enclosed public places within their respective jurisdictions.

1. (1) Every Operator of an Enclosed Public Space shall adopt a policy to ensure that no member of the public is permitted to enter or remain in the public areas of the Enclosed Public Space unless he or she is wearing a face covering/mask that securely covers their nose, mouth and chin, with specific exceptions.
2. Implementation of the policy should be enacted and enforced in 'good faith' and should primarily be used as means to educate people on face covering/mask use in enclosed public spaces.

This decision followed a review of our current situation in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, research evidence, WHO, federal and provincial recommendations, along with input from many members of our communities.

The Instruction was planned to be reviewed in September 2020.

Review of Face Covering/Mask Use Instruction

The review of the Face Covering/Mask Use in Enclosed Public Spaces Instruction identified the following.

The Risk of COVID19 Continues in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark

- In LGL, the number of people infected with COVID-19 was low during the summer months, and has been increasing since late August.
- A review of COVID-19 cases in neighbouring health units over the past 2-weeks indicates an upward trend for all neighbouring health units, with a high number of active cases in the Ottawa Public Health region. This poses a risk within LGL, since many residents of LGL work or travel to neighbouring areas and vice-versa.
- The number of people infected with COVID-19 in Ontario is rising quickly. Strict adherence to public health measures is critical to prevent a similar increase in LGL.

Research Supports Face Covering/Masks for Source Control

- The COVID-19 virus can be spread to others in the day or two before people develop symptoms, and sometimes people who are infected don't develop any symptoms yet can still transmit the virus to others. Face coverings/masks decrease the amount of secretions from the mouth and nose that enter the air around the person – the amount depends on the type of fabric being used and if the face covering/mask fits well.
- There is increasing research evidence¹ that the wide use of face coverings/ masks by the community, when combined with staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, physical distancing, and regular cleaning, can make a significant difference in the spread of COVID-19.

Provincial, federal and International Guidance Support Facial coverings/Mask Use

- **Provincial media release²** from Minister Elliott: "As the number of cases continue to increase, we cannot afford to let our guard down. It remains critically important for everyone to continue to follow public health advice and measures as we implement this plan. Everyday actions like physical distancing, wearing a face covering and staying home when you are ill will help us protect each other and the most vulnerable as we continue our fight to stop this virus."
- **Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC³)** " Wear a non-medical mask or cloth face covering to help stop the spread of COVID-19, especially if it's not possible to consistently maintain a 2-metre physical distance from others. Wear your mask or cloth face covering safely and make sure it fits well."
- The **World Health Organization (WHO⁴)** has "updated its guidance to advise that to prevent COVID-19 transmission effectively in areas of community transmission, governments should encourage the general public to wear masks in specific situations and settings as part of a comprehensive approach to suppress SARS-CoV-2 transmission." One specific situation is "General population in public settings, such as grocery stores, at work, social gatherings, mass gatherings, closed settings, including schools, churches, mosques, etc. "

The Use of Face Covering/Mask is Now Part of the LGL COVID-19 Response

- School are now open and LGL students in grade 4 and up are required, and other children recommended, to wear a face covering/mask when in school and on buses by the Ministry of Education.
- On a survey of business in July 2020, 87% had posted the Face Covering/Mask Use Instruction poster, and those that hadn't agreed to do so after the interview.

¹ See www.Masks4Canada.org and <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/covid-wwksf/what-we-know-public-masks-apr-7-2020.pdf?la=en>

² Minister Elliott <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/58610/ontario-delivers-28-billion-covid-19-fall-preparedness-plan>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/measures-reduce-community.html#w>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

- A survey with individuals who had called the Health Unit's phone lines indicated that almost all survey participants (98%) indicated that they wear a Face Covering/Mask when they visit stores.
- Followers of the Health Unit's Facebook and Twitter accounts were highly engaged with the messaging related to the Instruction. Posts related to the Instruction reached over 90,000 people and generated hundreds of comments. The themes from these comments included positive support for the Instruction, questions about the rationale and evidence behind the Instruction, personal experiences with wearing masks in public places, and clarification regarding exemptions and expectations for employees.

Decision

Given the above, as Medical Officer of Health, I have decided that the Face Covering/Mask Instruction for Leeds, Grenville and Lanark will continue as long as the **Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020** is in effect. [ONTARIO REGULATION 364/20](#) states:

General compliance

(2) **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.

I encourage everyone in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark to be COVID SMART, and restrict social gatherings, to protect ourselves and each other from COVID-19 infection.

- **S** – **Self-isolate** if you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#). [Consider getting tested](#).
- **M** – **Mask/face covering** on when in enclosed public spaces and when physical distancing is a challenge outdoors.
- **A** – Avoid touching your face.
- **R** – Remain 2 metres/6 feet apart from people outside your household or Social Circle.
- **T** – Twenty (20) seconds for [regular hand hygiene](#) and respiratory etiquette (cough or sneeze into a tissue or your arm).