

MEDIA RELEASE

Let's Keep our Celebrations COVID-19 Free, urges Health Unit



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Timmins, Ontario — This fall, in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the threat of a second wave of COVID-19 infections through our area, the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) is reminding residents that being thankful this year should look different. According to Dr. Lianne Catton, Medical Officer of Health for the health unit, “We understand the challenges this brings for our communities which have been fortunate to not see dramatic increases in cases – so far – but we all must continue to work together to prevent similar surges from occurring here. The next few months are marked with special occasions such as Thanksgiving that traditionally bring large groups together; not spending them in-person with extended family may be the best option this year.”

Dr. Catton offers a number of suggestions for ways to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 during Thanksgiving celebrations. They include:

- Limiting holiday gatherings to family or household members only. Less people, less risk.
- Limit the length of time for the gathering. Less time, less risk.
- Consider celebrating virtually, especially if family members are at increased risk of severe illness (including the elderly, and people with medical conditions or weakened immune systems).
- Family members and students should assess the risk they may pose to their families and loved ones before returning home for Thanksgiving, looking at their own recent travel and potential exposure to the virus, including time spent in the “Three Cs”: closed spaces, in close contact, and crowded spaces.
- Consider wearing face coverings indoors and outdoors, even in private gatherings, especially when physical distancing can't be maintained.
- Don't visit if you have any symptoms, even if mild in nature: stay home, isolate and call to get tested.

“More than ever before, we must slow the spread of COVID-19 by following public health recommendations to protect one another,” says Dr. Catton. “Mark these special occasions with happy memories and not illness. No one wants to be the person who gives their loved ones COVID-19. We ask that you think carefully about where you go and what you do to protect the ones you love, especially those who are at greater risk.”

Head Office:
169 Pine Street South
Postal Bag 2012
Timmins, ON P4N 8B7

Phone: 705 267 1181
Fax: 705 264 3980
Toll Free: 800 461 1818

E-mail:
info4you@porcupinehu.on.ca
Web site: www.porcupinehu.on.ca

Branch Offices: Cochrane, Hearst,
Hornepayne, Iroquois Falls,
Kapuskasing, Matheson,
Moosonee, Smooth Rock Falls

Travel Recommendations

The health unit is also updating travel recommendations for the fall. According to Dr. Catton, “With increases in cases seen across the province, and in recognition that we are doing well with respect to COVID-19, the Porcupine Health Unit recommends residents avoid non-essential travel outside of Northern Ontario. Many parts of the province are seeing surges in cases, and are even in the second wave, and there have been cases related to travel within Ontario.”

The revised recommendations include:

- Reassess any travel plans, especially if outside of Northern Ontario, and especially if they involve areas with large numbers of COVID-19 cases.
- If you do need to travel, remember to follow all precautions to reduce the risk: wash your hands often, wear a mask, practice physical distancing, cough and sneeze etiquette, and refrain from touching your face.
- Avoid travelling to attend indoor social gatherings.

“We are grateful for the tremendous work of PHU community members who continue to take the steps necessary to reduce the risk of COVID-19. Our numbers reflect this commitment,” said Dr. Catton. “The challenge now is maintaining this — protecting our most vulnerable and remaining vigilant — to keep our numbers down. Northerners are adaptable people, we can work together and stay positive, as challenging as it may be. Let’s focus on spreading kindness, not COVID-19 this fall. Thank you for all the efforts you’re making to keep our communities healthy and safe.”

The Porcupine Health Unit is located in Northeastern Ontario, serving the entire Cochrane District and Hornepayne, in Algoma District. The main office is located in Timmins, Ontario, with branch offices in Cochrane, Hearst, Hornepayne, Iroquois Falls, Kapuskasing, Matheson, Moosonee and Smooth Rock Falls.

For further information, please contact:

Gary Schelling

Communications Specialist

Porcupine Health Unit

705-267-1181, ext. 2413

gary.schelling@porcupinhu.on.ca