Media Release
Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Pandemic Declaration Does Not Change Local COVID-19 Response

Although the World Health Organization today declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the area's Medical Officer of Health says there is no need to panic.

"At this time, we still do not have any local cases," says Lynn Noseworthy, Medical Officer of Health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit. "And while we may eventually see cases in our area, we have been working with our hospitals and health care partners to ensure we have supports in place to protect our residents and contain the spread of the illness when it arrives."

These supports include:

- Health unit nurses providing testing information to residents who call with questions;
- Nurses following up with anyone who is tested, as well as any of their contacts to ensure anyone impacted is tested and self-isolates to prevent any spread of the illness;
- Providing up-to-date information on case definitions and travel restrictions to callers through the Health Unit's call centre;
- Sending regular information updates to community agencies and partners.

Under the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, a pandemic is defined as the global spread of a new disease and is based on the spread of the disease, rather than the severity of the illness it causes.

"The illness itself has not changed," she says. "The majority of people who test positive for COVID-19 are experiencing mild symptoms and are recovering fully. We know that many people are experiencing heightened anxiety about COVID-19 and I want to reassure them. This declaration should not increase those fears."

The best thing people can do is work together to prevent the spread of the illness. The best way to do this is:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose as much as possible;
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands;
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm;
- Stay home if you or a family member are ill;

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HEAD OFFICE
200 Rose Glen Road
Port Hope, Ontario L1A 3V6
Phone · 1-866-888-4577
Fax · 905-885-9551

HALIBURTON OFFICE
Box 570
191 Highland Street, Unit 301
Haliburton, Ontario K0M 1S0
Phone · 1-866-888-4577
Fax · 705-457-1336

LINDSAY OFFICE
108 Angeline Street South
Lindsay, Ontario K9V 3L5
Phone · 1-866-888-4577
Fax · (705) 324-0455

- Regularly clean and disinfect (common disinfectant product) objects and high-touch surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, fridge/cabinet handles, countertops, light switches);
- If you are ill and must visit a healthcare provider, clinic, or hospital emergency department, call ahead or tell them right away when you arrive that you have a respiratory illness and wear a mask while waiting to be seen; and
- Avoid visiting people in hospitals or long-term care homes if you are sick.
- If you have travelled outside of Canada, self-monitor your health for flu-like symptoms for 14 days after your return. If symptoms develop during that time call the Health Unit at 1-866-888-4577, ext. 5020.

The Health Unit has been working with its health partners to develop strategies on how to screen additional people to help reduce the strain on the emergency departments. Once these strategies are finalized, additional information will be shared.

In the meantime, if people have questions or concerns on COVID-19, they can call the Health Unit at 1-866-888-4577, ext. 5020, or visit www.hkpr.on.ca. After hours, people can call Telehealth Ontario for medical advice toll-free at 1-866-797-0000.