



Message to New and Returning Post-Secondary Students from Dr. Vera Etches, Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health

Dear new and returning students,

On behalf of Ottawa Public Health (OPH), welcome to what we all know is going to be a unique school experience. COVID-19 has required some significant shifts in the way we live our lives, and we need to continue to rely on the collective efforts of our neighbours, partners, families, roommates and friends to keep community transmission low here in Ottawa. Everyone needs to do their part.

Over the last number of months, the Ottawa community has worked together to prioritize the safety and well-being of others. For those of you who have been part of these efforts – thank you for your dedication and adherence to public health guidelines. OPH is proud to be part of such an engaged and responsible community. For those who are new or returning to Ottawa, whether this is your first experience away from home or another year on your academic journey, the expectation is that you join our efforts to control the spread of the virus. We are in this together!

Please note that OPH provides the most up-to date information on a special section of our website – OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus, and through our [social media channels](#). OPH continues to encourage all residents to be [COVIDWise](#) and practice the following precautions:

- W**– Wear a [mask or face covering where required](#) or when you cannot maintain a physical distance of two metres (six feet).
- I**– Isolate yourself from others when you are sick (and get tested promptly if you have [COVID-like symptoms](#)).
- S**– Stay two metres (six feet) apart from those outside your household.
- E**– Exercise proper hand hygiene; wash your hands regularly and use sanitizer especially before touching your face.

As you get settled into your new environment and establish your new routine, OPH would like to ensure you're aware of the following information that is relevant to student life in Ottawa:

Mandatory Mask Bylaw in effect

There is a [Mandatory Mask Bylaw](#) in effect for [enclosed public spaces](#) in Ottawa. This Bylaw applies to public transportation, restaurants, bars, stores, and other enclosed public spaces, with [exemptions](#). The bylaw also extends to the [common and shared areas](#) of multi-unit dwellings, including residence and apartment buildings, as well as taxis and ride shares. Failure to adhere to the provisions set out in the Mandatory Mask Bylaw can result in tickets [being issued](#). OPH has been working with your school's administration to ensure preparedness for the Fall semester. As mandatory masking policies have been implemented for all students on campus, please be sure to review your school's policy prior to arriving on site.

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OPH also wants to remind you that not everyone can safely wear a mask, and that we should all continue to be [COVIDKind](#) and show compassion and understanding towards individuals who are exempt from wearing a mask due to medical reasons.

For more information about masks, please visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/masks](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/masks) and consult your institution's mask policy.

Gatherings

Though this is normally a celebratory time of year for students to reconnect and make new friends, you must continue to be [SocialWise](#) to limit your close contacts: keep gathering numbers as small as possible, ensure physical distancing, meet outside rather than inside, wear masks, wash your hands often and stay home if you are ill. Both on and off campus, gathering [limits](#) remain in place. While indoor gatherings over 50 people, and outdoor gatherings over 100 people are not permitted, much smaller groups, with physical distancing measures in place, are preferred. There is zero tolerance and Ottawa Bylaw and Regulatory Services are actively enforcing these gathering limits, with fines being issued for non-compliance. OPH encourages you to limit the number of people in your social circle to reduce the risk of further transmission.

Check out OPH's tips for how to [party](#) more safely while being COVIDWise.

Increase in Cases

Recently, Ottawa has experienced a concerning increase in the number of persons being diagnosed with COVID-19. These results have been linked to indoor gatherings (e.g. parties) and behaviours that have demonstrated a relaxation of COVID-19 precautions. The 20 to 29 age group now has the highest number of people who tested positive for COVID-19 in Ottawa. It is important that you follow the [COVIDWise](#) precautions to reduce the risk of unknowingly spreading the virus. People do not always feel sick when they have the COVID-19 virus.

The criteria and locations for when and where you can get [tested for COVID-19, are available on the OPH website](#).

What happens when someone tests positive?

Students who test positive for COVID-19, or who are identified as close contacts of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:

- a) Are required to self-isolate.
- b) Will be contacted by an OPH case manager for next steps and to answer your questions.

International Students

Ottawa is pleased to welcome students from all over the world. Students who are new or returning to Ottawa and arriving from international destinations are required to adhere to the 14-day isolation period set-out by the federal [Quarantine Act](#). For more information, consult the supports available through your institution for international students.



Multilingual Resources

OPH has developed [multilingual resources for diverse communities](#), as well as [resources for First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members](#).

Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Services

OPH continues to offer [sexual health](#) services at our 179 Clarence Street location. As well, [harm reduction services](#) (including supervised consumption services) are also offered at this location. For information about opioids and overdoses, please visit [StopOverdoseOttawa.ca](#).

Mental Health

We are all in this together. COVID-19 has understandably caused a lot of anxiety and apprehension for many people. It is ok not to be ok. For mental health supports, please visit OPH's [Mental Health and COVID-19 page](#) as well as your institution's students support services.

Be Prepared

Emergencies can happen anywhere, anytime. The campus where you study has an emergency plan; however, you play a big role in ensuring your own safety! Be prepared: keep extra masks handy, write down important contact numbers, consider storing non-perishable food, extra water and basic essentials. In an emergency, such as a power failure, and if you had to isolate for 14 days, these would be essential.

We understand the pandemic will present unique challenges specific to your academic and social experience at university and college. We thank you for your continued efforts in taking the necessary precautions to minimize transmission of the virus and protect the whole community by being [COVIDWise](#).

Have a great year!



Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health
Ottawa Public Health

Be COVIDWise



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