

September 28, 2020

Dear Partners in Health,

Thank you for your continued contributions to our community and ongoing efforts to support the COVID-19 response. Everyone is contributing in ways that I couldn't ever have imagined, and I value our continued work together to share critical messages to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

It's hard to believe it's been six months since OPH announced the first individual who tested positive for COVID-19 in Ottawa. The fear of contracting the virus when going out has been countered with evidence that if we practice physical distancing, wear a mask, stay home when sick and keep our hands clean, we are unlikely to see transmission of the virus. The fear of not enough masks and not enough hospital space has been addressed with better supply chains and contingency plans and the preventative behaviours of all of us. The uncertainty of how long the pandemic will last has given way to recognition that we are living with a constant risk of resurgence for the next year or more.

As the pandemic response continues, it is increasingly important that we continue to promote key practices that will help get us through these challenging times, and discourage practices that may pause our progress. Remember to [be COVIDWise](#):

- **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 or use sanitizer especially before touching your face.

The COVID-19 situation can be very stressful. It has created many changes in how we live and how we work. It has also challenged our coping skills. It is critical to take care of our mental health and there are many resources to support residents, including:

- The Ottawa Public Health [Employer's Guide](#) that provides information on protecting the mental health of employees working from home, essential workers, employees who were laid off and employees returning to work.

- There are many [resources for workplaces](#) around COVID-19 and overall mental health in the workplace.
- Please watch [these videos](#) for ideas of ways to support your mental health and that of your loved ones. These videos are available in English, French, Somali, Arabic and Mandarin.
- If you need to speak to someone about your struggles, there are [services and resources](#) available such as:
  - [Counselling Connect](#) provides free access to a same-day or next-day phone or video counselling session. This service is for children, youth, adults and families in Ottawa and the surrounding area. There is no waiting list.
  - The [Distress Centre Ottawa and Region](#) 24/7 - 613-238-3311 in English or [Tel-Aide Outaouais](#) - 613-741-6433 in French.

Ottawa Public Health has worked with many partners to highlight and promote these resources on [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVIDMentalHealth](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVIDMentalHealth). Remember that it is ok to not be ok.

As we continue to respond to the pandemic, I am also writing requesting your help. Using the resources, networks, and tools at your disposal, please take the time to continue to share these important messages with your diverse audiences. It is incredibly important that we remain consistent in our message that we have the ability to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Please know that we are here to support you in getting this message out to Ottawa residents. If you have ideas or specific needs to support these efforts, please do not hesitate to reach out to me and to my team.

Thank you for all you do, and for helping keep the residents of our city safe.

Sincerely,



**Vera Etches** MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health  
Ottawa Public Health