

MEDIA RELEASE

Porcupine Health Unit Working to Prepare for COVID-19



For Immediate Release — Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Timmins, Ontario — Dr. Lianne Catton, Medical Officer of Health for the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) confirmed today that there are still no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the PHU area, although testing has been taking place. “All results from testing in our area have, so far, been negative,” she said today. “We’ve had our COVID-19 Info-Line in operation since last week to screen for testing.”

Since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Canada, the Porcupine Health Unit has been working with all levels of government to implement a local response to the pandemic. “We know that there are a lot of questions about the disease and how to control its spread, but I encourage everyone to follow the current recommendations to protect the health of everyone across the health unit area.”

Among the recommendations, Dr. Catton noted that travellers have a very important role to play. “We ask that people avoid all non-essential travel, and that when international travellers return, they self-isolate for 14 days.” She added, “We ask travellers to self-monitor and watch for any symptoms, like fever, coughing and/or difficulty breathing.” If people have symptoms, they can complete an on-line self-assessment tool to determine next steps.

Dr. Catton wants communities to be aware of the need to cancel any gatherings. “The less time people spend in large crowds or crowded places, the less chance the disease has to spread,” she said. In addition, it is required to close all recreational programs and libraries; private schools; childcare centres; churches and other faith settings; bars and restaurants, except for restaurants that can provide takeout or deliver.

The current recommendations about personal contact are that people practice “social distancing” which, according to Dr. Catton, means, “keeping a distance of ideally two metres between yourself and others.” She added, “these recommendations only apply to people without symptoms. One of the most important messages — and we can’t stress this enough— is that if you are experiencing symptoms related to COVID-19, please stay home and self-isolate, reducing the potential exposure of the disease to family members.” Most importantly, she adds, “take extra precautions to avoid spreading the disease to the elderly and other vulnerable people.” These, she said is the main reason why local hospitals and retirement homes have restricted visitor access. “Please respect the visiting restrictions and, when in doubt, call in advance,” Dr. Catton requested. She also urges all persons of 70 years of age and

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individuals who are immunocompromised to self-isolate for 14 days. “Older adults should stay at home as much as possible and get help from family and friends for essential errands.”

One other request Dr. Catton has for the residents is “to support people across the region that are involved in responding to this rapidly changing situation.” For example, she noted that “Spreading misinformation makes it harder for health professionals and support people to do their jobs.” She points to the Porcupine Health Unit’s and the Government of Ontario’s Facebook pages and websites as reliable sources of information. “We’re committed to keeping all our communities informed about the situation, how we’re responding and to provide practical advice for residents and their loved ones.

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.

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