

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Friday, March 06, 2020

Media Coordinator  
705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520  
Kathy Dermott (x 8533/7864)  
mediainquiry@smdhu.org

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**Health unit prepares for a COVID-19 pandemic and encourages the public do the same**

**SIMCOE MUSKOKA** – While the risk of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) is currently low for our area and there are no confirmed cases here, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is planning for the potential arrival of widespread community transmission of the virus, and is urging the community to prepare as well.

“The world situation has changed significantly in a short period of time. While we can’t predict what will happen locally, we still have time to plan, prepare and be ready for potential disruptions caused by having many people ill very quickly over a number of weeks,” said Dr. Colin Lee, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. “Businesses need to plan for a significant number of their employees being ill or asked by public health to stay at home for a prolonged period of time, and households need to gradually ensure a two week supply of essential items. People should also connect and plan with friends, family and neighbours, especially those who are vulnerable, on how to help each other.”

According to the World Health Organization, a pandemic is the world-wide spread of a new disease where most people do not have immunity. The health unit is working with health sector partners to ensure that the healthcare system will be able to assess, test and care for the ill, similar to the successful response to the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic. Most people will not require hospitalization and will be able to recover at home. Close contacts of those ill may be asked to stay at home for up to two weeks. In order to further slow the spread of the virus, there is the possibility that large public events will be discouraged or cancelled, and schools may also be closed for a number of days.

The health unit recommends that individuals, businesses and organizations prepare for possible disruption. For individuals and families, these preparations include:

- Make plans for the care of children or other dependents in case you are ill or in the event of prolonged school closures.
- Fill your prescriptions and have a supply of over the counter cough, cold and fever medications to help with symptoms.
- Gradually build up a two week supply of household items such as non-perishable food, canned foods, frozen fruits and vegetables, and pet food.

- Have an adequate supply of hygiene products, such as toilet paper, diapers, tissues and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Make a contact list of friends, family and neighbours whom you can call upon to help, such as drop off food or supplies, and also for whom you can do the same.

Businesses should:

- Ensure the workplace is clean and hygienic by cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects such as phones, doorknobs and keyboards.
- Promote good hand hygiene and cough etiquette by all employees and customers.
- Have a plan to carry on with the business in the event of significant absenteeism.
- Plan for the possibility for employees to be able to work from home or remotely.
- Consult [federal travel advisories](#) before going on business trips.
- Communicate that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community, employees with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more) need to stay at home.
- Try to not seek medical/sick notes for employees who fall ill.

You can protect yourself by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or washing your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty. Try not to touch your face. You can help to reduce the spread of respiratory infections such as coronavirus by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing, and by staying home when you are sick.

For more about COVID-19 and how you can protect yourself, see [www.smdhu.org](http://www.smdhu.org) or call Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.