FAQs from Aging Well In Ottawa Facebook Live Event

Event Date: June 3, 2020

These answers are based on the information available as of September 9, 2020. The current situation around COVID-19 is evolving and new guidance as the province reopens may result in changes to some of these answers. We will make every effort to ensure the information is updated in a timely fashion. For up to date information, please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus.

FAQs:

My husband, who is 70 years old and has asthma, is wanting to return to work. Not everyone wears masks, how concerned should I be? Can he do anything to minimize his risk of contracting COVID-19?

Ottawa Public Health states that the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases progressively with age, particularly beyond 50 years of age. People who have serious underlying medical conditions (such as: cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, chronic liver disease, cancer, are immunocompromised) or who are severely obese are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Everyone needs to assess their own risk and be COVIDWise when making decisions about returning to work and going out, especially older adults as they are more vulnerable to this virus.

We understand how important returning to work is for our mental health as well as the economy. On our Businesses and Workplaces webpage we have recommendations your husband can take to help reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 while at work. Also, it is now mandatory to wear masks in many indoor public spaces. For more information, please visit Ottawa Public Health's masks page.

I want to host a family gathering this summer with multiple family members outside my immediate household – will I able to do this? If so, when do you think this type of activity will be allowed?

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) strongly encourages residents to continue to only be in contact without physical distancing with members of their own household and to limit the additional number of people with whom they come into contact.

The province of Ontario now allows individuals to form groups of 10 or fewer people who agree to become part of an exclusive social circle amongst whom they may have closer contact. The ministry website provides more information about how to maintain a social circle. Be aware that social circles do not provide a guarantee of safety. While individuals who are part of a 10 person (maximum) social circle can gather, they should remember that there is a higher risk of transmission of COVID-19 for every additional person with whom people come into close proximity.
Commonly shared, touched surfaces and items should be cleaned and disinfected frequently (e.g., at least once a day) to limit the potential spread of germs. Frequent hand hygiene (in particular, do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands) and respiratory etiquette help prevent the spread of the virus.

It is important that we all become COVIDWise and SocialWise. Activities have high to low levels of risk when it comes to spreading the virus. You need to assess your own risk, as certain groups are at a higher risk (older adults, people with a weakened immune system or a chronic health condition) of developing complications from COVID-19.

**Will there be drive through COVID-19 testing in Ottawa for Older Adults?**

Yes. The COVID-19 drive-thru Assessment Centre on Coventry Rd. is an out-of-hospital testing site where people with pre-booked appointments can get tested by a health-care provider from their cars. It is operated by The Ottawa Hospital, in partnership with Ottawa Public Health and the City of Ottawa.

The Drive-thru Assessment Centre on Coventry Rd. is available by appointment only.

For up-to-date information on where you can get tested, please go to the Ottawa Public Health website.

**Is walking through a quiet neighbourhood considered a risky activity for an older adult?**

Certain groups (older adults, people with weakened immune systems or chronic health conditions) are at a higher risk for developing COVID-19 complications. For those who are able to go outside, it is important to practice physical distancing by staying 2 metres (6 feet) apart from others and to carry a mask with you in case you need it.

For information about the risk levels of different activities, please visit the Ottawa Public Health Be COVIDWise page.

**Where can I find information on what is allowed to open?**

For information about what can reopen, please visit the Ontario Government’s webpage to view Ontario’s Reopening Framework.

Information about what the current situation is in Ottawa is available on Ottawa Public Health’s website.

**I live in an apartment building. Should I be worried about COVID-19 spreading through ventilation or plumbing, or catching it from using communal services like the elevator and garbage chute?**

COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person through direct contact and over short distances from respiratory droplets expelled from talking, coughing or sneezing. A person may get COVID-19 from touching contaminated surfaces (such as elevator buttons and other frequently touched surfaces) and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes with unwashed hands.
Good hand hygiene is essential to reduce the spread of infection. It is important to wash your hands after touching surfaces such as the buttons on elevators and garbage chute handles. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, for 15-20 seconds. Do not touch your face with unwashed hands. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Ottawa’s Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law (2020-186) requires that every person who enters or remains in an enclosed public space shall wear a mask in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin. This includes the common areas of multi-unit dwellings.

Currently, there is no evidence that transmission of COVID-19 takes place through ventilation systems.

For information on reducing your risk of contracting COVID-19 please visit Ottawa Public Health’s recommendations for multi-unit dwellings webpage.

How risky is grocery shopping versus curb side pick-up?

Ottawa Public Health states that the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases progressively with age, particularly beyond 50 years of age. People who have serious underlying medical conditions (such as: cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, chronic liver disease, cancer, are immunocompromised) or who are severely obese are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Every individual needs to consider their personal risk factors when making decisions about going out and remember to always be COVIDWise.

This includes wearing a mask, which is mandatory, when you are in most indoor public spaces. If you are in self-isolation and you need groceries or other essentials please visit the Human Needs Task Force Fact Sheet on Food Resources.

Curb side pick-up may allow you to come into contact with fewer people and you can avoid touching unnecessary items.

If you do choose to go grocery shopping, please visit Ottawa Public Health’s Grocery Shopping, Meal Planning, and Cooking During COVID-19 webpage for safe shopping tips. Whether you choose to do curb side pick-up or go into a grocery store, be sure you wash your hands immediately afterwards.

When will medical offices reopen?

The Ontario Ministry of Health has encouraged primary care providers to continue to use virtual/telephone consultations whenever possible. Some medical offices are open for in-person appointments (under certain circumstances) with strict COVID-19 precautions and measures in place.

If you feel that you require an in-person consultation with your health care provider, call their office for more information.

Does wearing a face shield protect others and me from contracting COVID-19?

A face shield is not a substitute for wearing a mask as it does not filter respiratory droplets.
Will there be a second wave of COVID-19? What would be the indications that a second wave is coming?

COVID-19 is a new virus and whether there will be a second wave is unknown at this time. In order to keep the number of infections in our community low, we need to ensure we are being COVIDWise: practicing physical distancing, washing our hands and wearing a mask when in indoor public spaces which is now mandatory and outdoors when it is difficult to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres. This is especially important as places and businesses are reopening and we resume our activities. Indicators of a second wave would be an increase in cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Is there a better test between the nose swab and the throat swab?

The recommendation by the Public Health Ontario Laboratory is that people who receive a COVID-19 test at an assessment clinic or at a hospital receive a nose swab.

A health care provider can determine what testing is needed based on a person’s individual needs and circumstances. For up to date information about where you can get tested, please visit the Ottawa Public Health COVID-19 Assessment Centre and Care Clinics page.

What are the testing options for people who do not have a vehicle and who do not wish to take public transit?

Individuals should be taking their own personal vehicles to the assessment centre with no unnecessary passengers. If this is not possible, they should be taking a method of transport that minimizes their exposure to other people such as a taxi or rideshare. They should sit in the rear seat passenger side, wear a mask, ensure the window is down and take note of the transportation information (e.g.: taxi number, date and time). For more information, please visit the Ottawa Public Health COVID-19 Assessment Centre and Care Clinics page.

I would like to have a visit from my home-care worker. What steps can I take to protect them and myself?

The Ontario Ministry of Health provides guidance for home and community care providers. Here are some recommendations that both you and the care provider can do to ensure that the visit is carried out as safely as possible:

- The care provider should conduct self-monitoring practices for COVID-19 as well as the screening practices in place by their employer and should not go to work if sick.
- Care providers are to screen all clients by phone before visiting. If this is not possible, then screening should be done upon arrival at the home while maintaining physical distancing.
- Care providers can check who else will be in the home at the time of the visit and screen them too when appropriate.
- Care providers should wear surgical/procedure masks at all times during the entirety of the home visit.
• You should ensure that the care provider who is coming does not have any symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, cold like symptoms, etc.) before they enter.
• Wear a mask as physical distancing will be difficult to maintain during the visit.
• Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
• Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into the arm, not the hand.
• Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth unless hands have just been washed.
• Clean and disinfect areas of contact by the care provider – doorknobs, taps, etc.
• Avoid contact such as handshakes and sharing pens.

Will doctors be able to continue with phone call appointments for seniors, even after OHIP no longer covers the cost of these appointments for the rest of the population?

In every phase of the Reopening Framework by the province, continued protections for at risk populations is mentioned. In the first phase of reopening, health services were able to resume, including some in-person services as well as ongoing virtual services.

As OHIP covers the costs of medical appointments, this decision would be made at a provincial level. You may wish to reach out to your MPP to voice your support for this. You may also consider speaking with your doctor to find out how they will be conducting appointments as reopening continues.

Are there any statistics on how Canadian ethnic minorities are faring with COVID-19?

Dr. Etches mentioned in her June 5th statement that a report was published recently by Public Health Ontario on COVID-19 and diversity. Details on the report can be found on our Special Statements From Officials webpage.

Is there contact tracing happening in Ottawa so we can identify hot spots?

Ottawa Public Health does contact tracing when a COVID-19 case is identified. Close contacts of the positive case are informed that they have a risk of exposure, without breaching confidentiality and personal identity.

Ottawa Public Health has a map of COVID-19 cases across Ottawa Wards. This map cannot be used to identify “COVID-19 hot spots” in Ottawa. Areas with lower or higher rates are not more or less “safe” from COVID-19 transmission. The map is based on the place of residence of Ottawans with confirmed COVID-19 and does not necessarily reflect where the disease was contracted. For more information, please visit the Ottawa Public Health COVID-19 Dashboard.
**Will I be notified if someone in my apartment building has tested positive for COVID-19?**

Confirmed and suspected cases of COVID-19 are reportable to local health authorities under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

You will be notified by Public Health if you are considered a close contact of someone in your apartment building who has tested positive for COVID-19. Public Health will not be following up with persons who are not considered close contacts.

Please visit [Ottawa Public Health’s resource page](https://www.ottawahcp.ca) for more information about COVID-19 and multi-unit dwellings like apartments.

**Is it safe for older adults to use public transportation?**

We know that people have to use public transportation if they need to get to work, health appointments, social connections and other supports. Ottawa Public Health recommends using public transport with caution.

Dr. Etches encourages all of us to use our growing knowledge of what activities are considered lower risk and what activities are higher risk to make our own judgments about what is best for us. While we can never make everything perfectly safe, we can focus on what we can do to decrease the risk. Visit OPH’s [Be COVIDWise](https://www.ottawahcp.ca/be-creativedose) for further information and remember customers and [OC Transpo](https://www.octranspo.ca) employees are required to wear masks before entering a station or boarding a vehicle.