

Media Release



Mandatory Masks or Face Coverings for Indoor Public Spaces **July 15, 2020 - For immediate release**

On July 13, 2020, the Ontario government announced that 24 public health regions will be moving into stage 3 of the government's re-opening framework ([Stage 3 framework](#)), beginning Friday July 17, 2020. Timiskaming district is one of the areas that will be moving to stage 3. While these reduced restrictions are a positive development for the local economy, we need to ensure safety and prevention of future COVID-19 outbreaks remain a focus for our communities.

As of Friday, July 24, 2020, all commercial establishments in the district of Timiskaming will be required to ramp up their efforts to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. As part of COVID-19 prevention efforts, Dr. Glenn Corneil, Acting Medical Officer of Health for Timiskaming Health Unit, is issuing instructions to owners and operators of commercial establishments, as well as public transit, to have policies in place to prevent people from entering their business if they are not wearing a mask or face covering. The instructions are being issued [under the authority](#) of the provincial [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#).

"The masking or face covering requirement for commercial premises that are open to the public is in addition to the diligent work businesses are already doing to ensure public health measures are in place, such as physical distancing and hand sanitization. Face coverings are extra protection to prevent COVID-19 spread, they also send a message that the wearer wants to protect others," said Dr. Corneil. "With our district now moving into stage 3 of reopening, there is also an increase of risk in spreading the virus, as more people will naturally be in situations where more contact is possible. Establishing routine masking or face coverings helps reduce this risk and also helps to protect us against a potential second wave in the fall," added Dr. Corneil.

Commercial establishments are expected to use their best efforts to implement their face covering policies. This means that signs and verbal reminders are used but there is not a requirement that a business must turn away the customer. This is in line with the "good faith" enforcement framework of the Timiskaming Health Unit's instructions, which builds on education and reminders.

In today's instruction letter, **all employers** are reminded of their ongoing responsibilities to ensure all public health measures are in place within their business.

For **owners or operators of commercial establishments or of public transit**, the additional face covering responsibility comes into effect at 12:01 a.m., Friday, July 24, 2020. A face covering means a medical or non-medical mask or other mouth and nose coverings such as a bandana, a scarf or cloth that covers the mouth and nose. Certain exemptions apply, for example, based on age or medical circumstances.

“As we adapt to this new preventative measure I encourage everyone to be patient, and respectful of one another. Wearing a mask or face covering while shopping or on public transit will now be standard practice in Northern Ontario and throughout much of the province, ,” said Dr. Corneil.

Accumulating epidemiological evidence indicates that the widespread use of face coverings by all persons decreases the spread of respiratory droplets, and expert opinion supports the widespread use of face coverings to decrease transmission of COVID-19.

Public Health is reminding residents to follow public health guidance - wash your hands; cover your cough or sneeze with your arm or a tissue; avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth; stay two metres apart from others; wear your face covering, and stay home when ill. If you have any COVID-19 symptoms, please get tested.

For more information please visit ([COVID page](#)) or call Timiskaming Health Unit at 705-647-4305 or 1-866-747-4305 toll-free.

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