



St. Thomas Site
Administrative Office
1230 Talbot Street
St. Thomas, ON
N5P 1G9

Woodstock Site
410 Buller Street
Woodstock, ON
N4S 4N2

News

May 26, 2020

Southwestern Public Health expects COVID-19 measures to be our 'new normal'

Local health experts advise continued public health practices until treatments and vaccinations are widely available

As Ontario continues to loosen restrictions and re-open the economy, officials at Southwestern Public Health caution that COVID-19 will be an indefinite threat.

Based on global epidemiology models and known attributes of coronaviruses, it is probable the COVID-19 virus will continue to spread. The World Health Organization issued a warning on May 13 that novel-coronavirus will likely become embedded in populations, just as other infectious diseases and viruses have.

Southwestern Public Health expects public health practices – physical distancing, wearing a cloth mask, staying home when sick, and washing your hands frequently – will be critical to controlling the spread of the virus until medical treatments or vaccines are widely available.

“The possibility of spreading or catching COVID-19 will be here for a while,” says Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health at Southwestern Public Health. “Until we develop a vaccine or have significant levels of immunity, these measures will be our new normal.”

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, initial provincial modelling scaled to local population size projected the Southwestern Public Health region to see up to 2,000 daily cases at the peak of the outbreak. As of May 26, there have been 73 total cases and 4 deaths in the region. Health experts attribute public health interventions, such as physical distancing, as a contributing factor to the reduced number of positive COVID-19 cases.

Southwestern Public Health epidemiologists are reviewing international, national and provincial research to determine what the impact of public health measures has been. A recent epidemiology model¹ predicts a spike in deaths from COVID-19 – up to a total of 1,500 deaths provincially by late-June – if all physical distancing measures are eliminated in May.

¹ Citation: Prediction models developed by Dr. Ashleigh Tuite, Dr. Amy Greer and Dr. David Fisman, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, April 25, 2020.

“Other countries saw a surge in cases when they started relaxing public health measures. If we do it too quickly here, we could see the same,” says Dr. Lock. “We need to behave as if COVID-19 is all around us to reduce pressure on the health care system and avoid having to tighten restrictions once again.”

Southwestern Public Health continues to monitor the COVID-19 spread globally, provincially and in neighbouring regions to be able to identify a potential second wave. Visit www.swpublichealth.ca/covid-19 for updated information for the Oxford County, Elgin County and City of St. Thomas regions.

Recommended Data Support

- Southwestern Public Health – COVID-19 local dashboard:
https://public.tableau.com/profile/foundational_standards#!/vizhome/MOBILE-FRIENDLYEXTERNALCOVID-19Dashboard/Summary
- Southwestern Public Health – High-risk regions in Canada:
https://swpublichealth.ca/sites/default/files/high_risk_areas_in_canada_for_covid-19_20200513.pdf
- Ontario Medical Association – Provincial - Daily cases, new daily cases, demographics:
<https://public.tableau.com/profile/oma.era#!/vizhome/CovidTable/Dashboard22>
- University of Oxford (England) – Global COVID-19 case increases, epidemiology curves in real-time:
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/covid-confirmed-cases-since-100th-case?country=CAN+MEX+PAN+USA+DOM+CRI+CUB+HND+JAM+TTO+ABW+GTM+SLV+HTI+BMU+PRI>

About Southwestern Public Health

Southwestern Public Health works with its partners to ensure the health of the whole community. Our programs respond to public health emergencies; promote healthy lifestyles; help prevent injuries, illness and disease in the community; and promote positive change and social conditions that improve health. Southwestern Public Health delivers mandated programs under the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) and is regulated by the [Ontario Health Promotion and Protection Act](#). The health unit maintains primary locations in Woodstock and St. Thomas. For more information, visit www.swpublichealth.ca.

- 30 -

Contact

Megan Cornwell
Communications Manager | Southwestern Public Health
519.631.9900, ext. 1259
communications@swpublichealth.ca