

March 18, 2020

To the Residents of Haldimand and Norfolk County:

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Board of Health that serves Norfolk County and Haldimand County to provide an update on our local response to COVID 19.

Over the past two months, I have been in close contact with the Haldimand Norfolk Public Health Staff. I have also had dialogue with Mayor Ken Hewitt as well as senior provincial officials. I have also benefited from the counsel of Dr. Shanker Nesathurai, who serves as the Medical Officer of Health for the two counties.

At the onset, I want you to know that we have implemented an effective response to COVID 19. In advancing this objective, I have instructed the health unit staff to work closely with Norfolk County agencies, to implement a robust plan. Mayor Hewitt has also provided the same direction to Haldimand County agencies. There has also been collaboration among community organizations such as hospitals, community health centers, as well as police, fire and paramedic services.

At this point, the health unit is focused on working to contain the COVID 19 virus. As part of this strategy, the health unit works to identify every potential case, and facilitate testing. The health unit has set up a hotline for community members which is staffed on a 24 hour basis. Working with community partners, we have also organized a testing site, which is located in the community.

As of today, there is not a single confirmed case of COVID 19 in Haldimand and Norfolk County. However, I anticipate that the first case will undoubtedly arrive. If this were to happen, the healthcare professionals would manage this case as like other illness. We know that the people with COVID-19 will have flu like symptoms such as a dry cough, fever, chills and muscle aches. More importantly, most will recover at home without substantive treatment. A smaller percentage will need hospital care, and an even smaller percentage will regrettably succumb. Of course, as I am sure you have read, those at the greatest risk for fatality are the elderly and those already suffering from other medical issues. This is why it is so paramount for us to do everything we can to prevent the spread to those that are most vulnerable, particularly as we live amongst a comparatively elderly community.

As such, I want to emphasize some additional assertive steps the health unit has taken to limit the spread to the elderly community. This includes extending March Break, postponing large gatherings, closing day cares and county facilities, suspending non-core services, imposing visiting restrictions at long-term care facilities and nursing homes, and above all promoting social distancing and isolation to contain the spread.

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Preparations are being made not only for the first case that will undoubtedly eventually arrive our way, but equally, should we face a worst case scenario similar to what is being faced by our friends in Italy. Both Haldimand County and Norfolk County have activated their emergencies planning groups, which facilitate the coordination of the multiple agencies working to keep you safe. As part of this effort, I have asked the Norfolk County emergency operating center to prepare a plan to temporarily expand capacity at county operated healthcare centers at an offsite location. Mayor Hewitt has also done the same. This expansion will assist our hospital partners manage an increase in patients, if required sometime in the future.

During a time such as this, it is critical that you receive the most accurate information possible. As such, it is essential that you receive information directly from Dr. Nesathurai and our experts. To that end, please continue to regularly check our dedicated webpages that has been created to keep you updated with municipal measures being implemented to fight COVID-19.

<https://www.norfolkcounty.ca/covid19/>

<https://www.haldimandcounty.ca/covid-19/>

The Board of Health recognizes that COVID 19 has affected community members. Many of the measures to try to reduce the spread of this virus have been disruptive to families, businesses and community organization. In this regard, I recognize that certain policies related to COVID 19 will affect the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. These are people who travel from other countries to work with famers in Norfolk and surrounding areas. These workers – and the farms they support – are a vital part of Ontario’s food supply chain. That’s why I’m strongly advocating for our farmers and am hopeful that a common sense resolution can be reached as soon as possible.

In closing, I want each of you to know that we have implemented a suite of coordinated measures that effectively address COVID 19. Although, it is difficult to predict the future, now is the time to each do our part. There is *strength in unity*, and this is where we should focus our energies.

Sincerely,



Mayor Kristal Chopp  
Chair of Board of Health