



April 12, 2020

Dear Ottawa Community Associations,

Thank you to everyone who continues to support planking the curve – staying home and keeping your physical distance. We can change the impact that this pandemic has on our city when we all work together.

The actions you are taking now will save lives and make a difference for your friends, family, neighbours and colleagues. Remember that COVID-19 affects everyone regardless of age and current health status. We often hear stories of older adults with COVID-19, as individuals older than 65 years old often experience the worst outcomes from COVID-19. However, 79% of all confirmed cases in Ottawa are among people younger than 65. It is important for all of us to do our part and prevent the spread.

### Clarification about testing

Our website has been updated with the [latest COVID-19 testing criteria](#). We will continue to update the public with any new changes in testing recommendations that come from the Ontario Ministry of Health. Continuing to expand access to testing is important into the future to enable more targeted strategies and relaxation of physical distancing.

If you think you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who has it, use the [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) to help determine how to seek further care.

### Clarification who needs to seek care and where to go

We continue to hear that people want more clarity about where to get tested or access health care for COVID-19.

- [The Brewer Arena Assessment Center](#) is the primary location for swabbing people who need to be tested for COVID-19.
- If you can manage your symptoms at home (e.g. your symptoms are generally mild), be tested if you meet the [latest COVID-19 testing criteria](#), but you may not need to seek further health care.
- If you have escalating symptoms of respiratory illness, including a fever or worsening cough and flu-like symptoms, *and* are in need of medical attention, you should go to a [COVID-19 Care Clinics](#).
- If you are in distress (e.g. significant trouble breathing, chest pain, fainting, or have a significant worsening of any chronic disease symptoms), do not go to the Assessment Centre or a COVID-19 Care clinic. Go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 9-1-1.

Anyone with serious illness should never hesitate to go to Emergency Departments. The Ottawa-area hospitals all have capacity to provide emergency service to those who need it and they are using strict infection prevention and control measures.

## Helping children cope during the COVID-19 pandemic

Being apart from friends and family can be challenging for everyone. For children and teens, it can be even more difficult. It is important that everyone practice [physical distancing](#), but this idea can be hard for young people to understand. Here are some things parents can do to help their children cope with this situation.

- Reassure them that they are safe
- Encourage them to ask questions, and to talk about how they feel
- Be understanding – they may have problems sleeping, be upset, and need extra care and attention
- Remember that kids look to their parents to feel safe and to know how to respond – reassure them and let them know you'll tackle this together
- Try to keep to normal routines and schedules – allow them to get outside and have supervised play. This is not a play date, so while out, remind them to keep 2 metres or 6 feet from others
- Encourage them to keep in touch with their friends or other kids their age through supervised video chats or phone calls

## Physical Distancing for Parents, Teens and Children

Physical distancing involves taking steps to limit the number of people with whom you and your family come into close contact. As COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person through direct contact or over short distances by droplets through coughing or sneezing, this is critical to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community. A person may also get COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly eyes. Though being apart from friends and family can be challenging even for adults, it can feel more like the end of the world for children and teens. Children can be more easily socially distanced than teens, who – quite frankly – push back more out of a need for greater independence.

The concept of physical distancing applies outside your home. Household contacts (people you live with) do not need to distance from each other unless they are sick or have travelled within the past 14 days. Physical distance and emotional distance are not the same. These recommendations are meant to keep physical space from other households, while staying emotionally connected!

## Older Adults Support

There is an [increased risk](#) for:

- older people
- people with chronic disease (for example, diabetes, cancer, heart, renal, or chronic lung disease)
- people with compromised immune systems

Follow these general instructions on [self-isolation](#).

## Help is Available

Many stores and services are offering special help for older adults.

Some grocery stores and pharmacies are opening their doors early and limiting the first hour of the day to older adults or people who are immunocompromised to give them a chance to shop when it is quieter. Call your preferred store or visit their website for the updated store hours and services.

While seniors' activity centres across Ottawa have shut down to limit the spread of COVID-19 among the vulnerable older adult population, senior/community centres continue to coordinate volunteers, plan meals, and reach out by phone.

To see what temporary changes are being offered, visit the [Regional Geriatric Program of Eastern Ontario \(RGPEO\) website](#) to see the latest updates.

## Remember to Practice Physical Distancing

Physical distancing means creating physical distance between ourselves so that we can limit the spread of the virus. Encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to do the same.

### Physical distancing includes:

- avoiding visits from loved ones
- avoiding visits to long-term care homes, retirement homes, supportive housing, hospices, and other large settings unless the visit is absolutely essential
- avoiding non-essential trips in the community
- keeping the windows down if you cannot use your own private car and must go into the community for an essential trip via taxi or rideshare
- cancelling group gatherings
- holding virtual meetings
- If you need groceries, medication or other essential items, you can arrange to have a family member, friend, neighbour, or anyone else who is not in self-isolation do this for you. Have items left at the door to minimize contact. Many people are happy to help.
- If you have to be in contact with others, practice physical distancing and keep at least 2 metres (6 feet) between yourself and the other person.

## Maintaining Positive Mental Health

- Check in with yourself. It's ok not to be ok. Please know that help is available, and we encourage you to reach out to Distress Centre of Ottawa to connect with someone at 613-238-3311 if needed.
- Stay connected to others in different ways. Check in with others by phone or other technology.
- For resources, please visit our [Mental Health and COVID-19 webpage](#).

It continues to be extremely important the residents are aware of the best way to reduce the spread of germs in our community.

- Practice physical distancing (2 metres or 6 feet apart) – Avoid all non-essential trips in the community
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have just cleaned their hands
- Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or into your arm, not your hand
- Stay home if you are sick
- Avoid visiting people in hospitals or long-term care centres if you are sick
- Avoid direct contact with other people. Use non-physical forms of greetings instead of shaking hands.

Thank you again for all the actions you are taking as a community – these actions matter. There would be more cases of COVID-19 in our community had everyone not done their part over the past month.

It is important to recognize that the COVID-19 situation is evolving very quickly. Please refer to [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus) to stay up-to-date on the latest information