

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Outbreak in Old Order Mennonite Community
Date: November 16, 2020
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To: Physicians, Primary Care Providers, Hospital Emergency Departments, Assessment Centres, Midwives
From: Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is currently responding to a cluster of COVID-19 cases within the Old Order Mennonite community in North Wellington. As of today, a total of 19 cases have been identified or linked to this cluster. This cluster includes cases linked to a parochial school outbreak as well as a large wedding that took place in Harriston on October 28. Some cases do not have identified epidemiological links to other cases.

In multiple instances, individuals with COVID-19 have not shared information about their close contacts with WDGPH staff. Close contacts, when identifiable, have generally not followed recommendations about getting tested for COVID-19 and/or have not committed to isolating if becoming ill. These decisions are driven by strongly held beliefs such as that COVID-19 is not real, that testing is inaccurate, or that the pandemic is politically driven. Actions resulting from these beliefs have made it difficult for WDGPH to conduct contact tracing in a robust way.

WDGPH is also aware that individuals in the Old Order Mennonite community have been attending large gatherings (e.g. weddings) and in many instances have not been following public health measures such as masking and physical distancing.

On November 13, the WDGPH issued Section 22 Orders under the Health Protection and Promotion Act requiring Old Order Mennonite churches and schools in the region to close and members of this Community to follow specific public health instructions and restrictions on gatherings.

The MOH and AMOH met with community leaders to discuss these orders and the community is working to come into full compliance with these Orders.

Actions for Primary Care Providers

WDGPH is asking for support from primary care providers who serve Old Order Mennonites within their practices. Specifically, WDGPH is asking:

- If your patient has symptoms, including cold-like symptoms, that suggest COVID-19 please assess them in person and try to collect a specimen for COVID-19 testing.

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- Please counsel your patient about the seriousness of COVID-19 and the danger that this infection can pose to them and to their community. Please do what you can to address any misconceptions about the nature of the pandemic. Specifically, WDGPH would appreciate if you could address:
 - The importance of wearing masks (face coverings), maintaining physical distancing, and avoiding large gatherings;
 - The importance of staying home and seeking care, if they become ill; and
 - The importance of sharing information with WDGPH staff in order to facilitate contact tracing.

- If your patient is not tested, but you believe that they meet the definition of a Probable Case, please report that information to the WDGPH COVID-19 Call Centre at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 7011 or the Reportable Disease Line at ext. 4752.

If you serve Old Order Mennonites within your practice and would like to speak further about how you can work with WDGPH or for more information, please contact:

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