

# HPPH recommendations on municipal meetings

## **Re: Practices to prevent COVID-19 transmission while conducting in-person municipal council meetings or events**

Ontario is now focusing on living with, and managing, COVID-19. With key public health and health system indicators such as positivity rates and hospital admissions continuing to improve or stabilizing at a manageable level across Ontario and in Huron Perth, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has cautiously and gradually eased public health measures. COVID-19 restrictions remaining in place in Ontario continue to be regulated through the *Reopening Ontario Act* and amendments to the *Reopening Ontario Act* and specifically, Ontario Regulation 364/20.

With restrictions easing, I urge caution at this time for the public, businesses, and organizations in Huron Perth in order to ensure that transmission and hospitalizations continue to decrease. This includes remaining aware that COVID-19 continues to circulate and remains a potentially serious illness; the following groups are at higher risk of severe outcomes (long COVID, hospitalization or death) from COVID-19:

- People of advanced age
- People living in congregate settings
- People with underlying health conditions
- People who are unvaccinated

As you make decisions on which measures to keep or change at your organization, keep in mind the groups of people above with risk factors, as well as your obligations under your existing Health & Safety, HR and other policies.

Several municipal councils and CAOs have requested guidance in resuming in-person council meetings and other municipal events. Here are my current recommendations to the councils for the municipalities in Huron and Perth Counties, the City of Stratford and the town of St. Marys who choose to resume in-person council meetings:

- **Provide options for virtual attendance** for staff, council and the public who chose to not return to chambers at this time as a precaution against COVID-19 transmission.
  - Such virtual options should include a means to ensure that public deputations can be made in alternate formats.

- **Aim to limit/reduce attendance** of council chambers to the number of people that can physically distance by 2 metres or more.
- **Continue to screen staff, council, and members of the public** to ensure that anyone entering council chambers is not symptomatic and/or has not been advised to self-isolate for COVID-19. This may include, among other activities, posting screening signs at all entrances to the premises of the business or organization (including municipal buildings) in a conspicuous location visible to the public and staff that inform individuals on how to screen themselves for COVID-19 prior to entering the premises. Here is signage provided by the province of Ontario: [COVID-19 Signage Questions for Businesses and Organizations](#).
- **Continue to recommend use of masks or face coverings** for staff, council and members of the public in chambers or other meeting rooms when not speaking.
- **Continue to utilize your COVID-19 safety plan** as a guide to assess risks and what measures would support a gradual and safe reopening.
- **Ensure HVAC systems are maintained** in accordance with manufacturer recommendations.

Please note that if your municipality is considering requiring face coverings or proof of vaccination, you must follow any applicable laws (e.g., Human Rights Code, Occupational Health and Safety Standards) and should obtain independent legal advice should you consider doing so.

I am hopeful and encouraged with decreasing trends in key COVID-19 metrics, however transmission rates are still quite high at this time. In addition, we do anticipate new variants of concern and seasonal rises in transmission, especially during the colder months of the year going forward. As a result, I encourage municipalities and councils to be nimble in their approach to re-opening their services, including municipal councils. Please continue to review our ongoing municipal updates, the [www.hpph.ca](http://www.hpph.ca) website and reach out to your usual HPPH contact if needed.

I am thankful to our municipalities in managing the pandemic through your continuing efforts in reinforcing provincial and Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) messaging, providing space and resources for vaccination clinics and offering important feedback to HPPH staff in managing public health measures.

On behalf of HPPH, please accept my gratitude for the excellent leadership and support that your municipal councils have provided, and continue to provide, in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

Dr. Miriam Klassen  
Medical Officer of Health & CEO,  
Huron Perth Public Health