

March 24, 2020

An Urgent Plea to the People of Newfoundland and Labrador

from

The Internal Medicine Specialists and Sub-Specialists of St. John's

For the past week we have watched and listened as the Provincial Government and the Department of Health have told us how to protect ourselves and others from the COVID-19 pandemic. They have stressed the importance of physical distancing, post-travel isolation and self-isolation after possible contact exposure, in an attempt to flatten the curve so our healthcare system will not be overwhelmed by a large increase in cases over a short period of time. Many of you are adhering to these recommendations and for that you have our thanks.

However, many of you are not adhering to these practices and there is no excuse!

We hear stories of packed taxi cabs on Friday night, playgrounds full of kids and see pictures of family gatherings posted on social media, despite officials urging social distancing. Not following government recommendations **will expose you to COVID-19**. Each new case of COVID-19 potentially risks the lives of dozens of other people including family, friends and healthcare professionals.

WE URGE YOU TO FOLLOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Physical Distancing:** Only associate with members of your household, your kids do not play with the kids next door, do not go to or host dinner parties/gatherings. Stay in your house or your yard. If you take a walk outside, avoid social interaction. You should only leave your home for essential needs. Not following this simple rule will cost lives, yours or someone you know.
- 2) Post-Travel Isolation:** Many of the current COVID-19 cases in NL can be traced to persons returning from international and/or domestic travel. We urge everyone who has returned from international and/or domestic travel within the past 14 days to **self-isolate** to avoid the possibility of spreading the virus to your family, friends and co-workers. **Self-Isolation means** isolating yourself from your family and friends to a bedroom and bathroom within your house. Do not mingle with your family and friends (maintain the minimum 2 meter distance), eat from disposable cutlery and dishes, use a separate bathroom, wipe down and clean any surfaces after use with appropriate cleanser. If you go far a walk, please cover your mouth and nose and do not touch anything while walking to and from the front door (ask another person to open and

close the door for you). Maintain the minimum 2 meter distance from others while outside. Monitor yourself for symptoms. If you have a thermometer we also recommend that you monitor your temperature for signs of fever twice per day (mid-morning and mid-evening). (<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Self-Isolation-Tips-and-Support-for-Returning-Travelers.pdf>)

- 3) **Self-Isolation after possible contact with COVID-19:** If there's a possibility that you have been exposed to COVID-19, please self isolate. (<https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/coronavirus/healthcareprofessionals/factsheet-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate.pdf>)
- 4) **Hand Hygiene:** We ask everyone to **PLEASE** follow recommended guidelines to wash your hands many, many times per day (for at least 20 seconds) using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Proper hand hygiene will minimize the risk of contracting the virus if your hands have come into contact with contaminated surfaces. (<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Covid19-Hand-Washing-Poster.pdf>)
- 5) **Cover Your Mouth and Nose when Sneezing/Coughing:** If you have to sneeze or cough, please be sure to minimize the spread of droplets by coughing/sneezing into a tissue, and discard into a waste bin. If you don't have tissues, sneeze/cough into the inner side of your folded elbow and then wash your inner elbow with soap and water or sanitizer. (<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Covid19-Prevention-Poster.pdf>)
- 6) **If You're Sick, Don't Go Out:** If you have symptoms that could be associated with COVID-19, do not go outside and do not mingle with others (including your family and friends). Isolate yourself at home and monitor your symptoms. Call 811 if you feel you are getting worse.

If we do not follow these strict rules at home, then a household of five people with one possible case of COVID-19 could quickly become a household of five cases of COVID-19, and multiply from there. This is likely what happened in Italy.

EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO THEIR PART

Newfoundland and Labrador has a geographical advantage over other parts of Canada. If we can minimize the COVID-19 spread, isolate **ALL** incoming travellers, identify and isolate possible COVID-19 contacts, practice correct Social Distancing, correct Self-Isolation, Hand Hygiene, etc., we can flatten the curve, so our healthcare system will not be overrun.

We will be on the frontline of this fight. When you get sick we will **Step Into Harm's Way** and provide the care and compassion you need. But right now, we are asking the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to **Step out of Harm's Way** to minimize the risk of spread of COVID-19 before it is too late.