



MEMORANDUM

To: All Employees of OPTIONS NORTHWEST

From: Anna-Marie Eckensweiler, Executive Director

Date: July 17, 2020

Re: Updates on re-opening of the province; family visits, Thunder Bay mask requirements and trying to continue to keep everyone safe.

Please put in COVID-19 binder

This memo is coming to you today via FAX for information before the weekend however all of the attachments/new screening information etc. will come to you in hard copy early next week. We wanted you to have advanced information on these matters.

Happy Friday everyone

Lots of announcements have occurred over the last week so we thought we would put out some communication to update everyone. As most of you are likely aware, the province is opening up for Stage 3. It is important to note that when these announcements come out, they generally are referencing the re-opening of the province with respect to the economy. It is the re-open of restaurants and recreation facilities etc. and most of us will all agree, the lock down has been long and not easy to give up a lot of things that we enjoyed and took for granted pre-pandemic.

1. As exciting as the re-opening of the province is for those of us working in this field we know that the individuals we support are still very vulnerable to COVID-19. With often compromised immune systems, or other underlying medical conditions, they are still at high risk if they should contract the infection. The Government of Canada's website references those with these conditions to continue to remain at home **unless it is necessary to be out for essential appointments**. We understand the weather is beautiful and cabin fever has lasted long enough.....but we are asking you as employees to really consider what is in the best interest of the individuals you are supporting at the time and whether going out is in their best interest. We continue to recommend going for walks, being outside, enjoying activities that can involve social distancing and wearing of masks. We aren't encouraging rushing back to malls, grocery stores, public places where social distancing cannot be maintained. Many of the individuals we support are not able to wear masks..... which poses even more challenges to keeping everyone safe. We also know people's mental health has been affected by not being able to see loved ones in person or being able to do the activities they love. Please review these situations with your supervisor to better determine if individuals should be going out to any specific events or activities. We strongly encourage you to consider the health and safety of the individuals supported but also yourself over the need to get out for the sake of just doing it.
2. An announcement was made on July 16th that Thunder Bay will have a **mandatory mask requirement for enclosed public spaces that will go into effect July 24th**. This rule will apply to any type of retail outlet, restaurants and bars, our administrative offices, and other public settings where there might be increased contact with other people. And while the new announcement acknowledges that people with

disabilities who may not be able to wear a mask are exempt, the emphasis is on the importance of wearing a mask in public places. We strongly recommend that if you are considering taking someone out who cannot wear a mask, that it only be for essential appointments. For employees in our administrative offices, you will be required to wear a mask whenever social distancing is not possible. In hallways, at the photocopier, where 2 or more are gathered and social distancing is not possible a mask will be required.

3. Visits with family directives sent out a few weeks ago have just recently been revised. **Effective July 22nd, COVID testing for family members will no longer be necessary.** Also, indoor visits can occur if social distancing can be arranged in the home and one designated area can be used. I have attached the specific guidelines of the new information as it pertains to family visits. Every employee is asked to **read and sign off** on this information as there is a lot of new direction in this area. Essential overnight visits to family are also now allowed, however it would require the individual returning to the home to self-isolate for 14 days. At this time, because of the self-isolation requirement, **we are not approving overnight visits.** The self-isolation component of this directive is very difficult for us to address in the group homes. While we have had to do it when individuals have returned home from hospital, it is challenging to achieve. Mark Beazley will be sending out the guidelines to families and also advising that overnight visits are not recommended at this time. And while indoor visits are now being allowed, **OPTIONS needs time to evaluate if we are able to meet the requirements to host these visits indoors.** There are specific guidelines on washing of furniture etc. that needs to occur with the visit and being able to have ample space to conduct the visit. Supervisors will be evaluating this the week of July 20th to determine if we are able to accommodate indoor visits. **Until told otherwise, only outdoor visits will occur at this time at the home.** Individuals are allowed to go with family for visits however we are not allowing the overnight or indoor visits at the homes at this time. The screening sheets for families have been amended and are enclosed as COVID tests are no longer required. Please dispose of the yellow ones on the clipboards and use the new **green** sheets instead.

We are most appreciative of all of the support and great work you have done during this time of pandemic. The information changes often and we recognize this is a lot to keep on top of. Please feel free to speak to your supervisor or another member of the management team if you have any questions on the information being shared. We thank you for everything that you continue to do to keep yourselves healthy and well and the individuals we support. Keep up the great work!!



Anna-Marie Eckensweiler
On behalf of the Pandemic Team