

COVID-19: UPDATE ON OUR SERVICES OPTIONS NORTHWEST

Service Update #2, 2021

OPTIONS NORTHWEST continues to alter services to protect public health and safety amid COVID-19.

January 15, 2021

For COVID-19 binders and please post in a prominent place in the homes.

The health and safety of the people we support, and our employees remain our priority as we continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and find the best and safest way to provide services.

Effective December 26th, 2020, Premier Ford put Northern Ontario into a state of “lock down” for a period of a minimum of 14 days. While OPTIONS had already put plans in place to restrict activities over the Christmas season, these lock down measures are now mandated by the provincial government.

Effective January 9th, 2021, Premier Ford extended the “lock down” for a period of another minimum of 14 days until January 23rd 2020.

Effective January 14th, 2021, Premier Ford announces 2nd Provincial declaration of Emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. This shutdown is in effect for all of Ontario and is anticipated to be in place until at least Thursday February 11th, 2021. Ontario felt this step was necessary to keep Ontarians safe and to be able to immediately respond to the ongoing threat of COVID-19.

****Additionally..... Based on assessed level of risk to the health and safety of persons served and/or employees, OPTIONS NORTHWEST reserves the right to introduce heightened pandemic precautions (beyond the guidelines provided by MCCSS, Public Health, and other government and health authorities), and/or to temporarily pause or revert to an earlier stage in provincial re-opening guidelines, and to apply either approach across one or more operating areas, or to apply in a site-specific manner.***

Like all Ontarians, we are following advice from local, provincial, and national health authorities to help stop the spread of the disease. OPTIONS NORTHWEST is continuing with the following to mitigate risk:

- OPTIONS NORTHWEST administrative sites continue to be **closed** to the general public. Altered services are available from each site, during our regular hours of operation from 8am to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:00. OPTIONS NORTHWEST is continuing to operate all programs however our approach has been modified to mitigate risk. Please call 807-344-4994 for further information about programs and services available at this time. There is an automated telephone attendant when an administrative member is not at their desk. Please follow the prompts to leave a message and your call will be returned.
- All administrative and SIL/CRT employees will be accessible via phone, video conferencing and limited face to face interaction depending on the circumstances.

During lock down, face to face interaction in other programs except congregate care, will only be for situations that are deemed essential or a matter of health and safety.

- In person family/friends visits as per our direction from December 15th and now with the emergency order, continue to be suspended until at least February 11th 2021. Family/friends may visit through a closed door or window while remaining outside, but people supported are not allowed to visit outside during this time. Those at end of life/palliative or very ill are exempt from this direction however arrangements need to go through a supervisor.
- All employees must wear both a surgical/procedural mask AND a face shield or goggles while working within the congregate care setting. The only exception to this is during employee mealtimes when the employee is eating. We will be providing additional training on PPE in the coming weeks as a refresher and some hands-on training will also be provided. Please ensure your PPE is stored properly in bags provided when you are eating and not left on counters, tables, or other surfaces.
- The new orders also indicate that if you are unable to physically distance more than two meters **outside**, a face mask is recommended.
- Employees working in administrative offices must always wear a face mask in public areas of the buildings and if engaging with another person in their own office. The only time a face mask is not required, is when working **alone** in your own office.
- Calling family or reaching out in non-face to face ways is **NOT cancelled** and is encouraged as a safe alternative to in-person visits for people supported.
- All employees/essential visitors will be screened for symptoms and taking of temperatures as they attend any OPTIONS NORTHWEST location. **They must also be wearing a face mask and shield and if not in their possession, must be provided to them prior to entry.**
- All attendance at public/crowded venues for recreation is prohibited until further notice. Gatherings for outdoors is generally restricted to no more than **5 people**.
- Going for a walk, is **NOT cancelled**, however this emergency order is directed to having people **stay home** unless it is for exercise. Walk only with those in your immediate household.
- Doing in home activities is **NOT cancelled**.
- Essential activities such as getting groceries is still allowed although online purchasing is recommended. Supervisors can assist with this.
- All in person training is currently suspended unless there is a situation where someone is end of life/palliative or very ill and requires specific in person training for pain management or other health reasons. Area orientation may occur at supervisor's discretion.
- The **student placements** from the College have been put **on hold** until after February 11th.
- Anyone who travels for either essential or non-essential reasons must quarantine for 14 days prior to returning to work. Travel is defined by the Health Unit as outside of Northwestern Ontario.
- **Gatherings during the lock down are restricted to being with those in your own household.**
- To reduce anxiety, do not ignore your feelings, remain calm and seek assistance if you are feeling overwhelmed. You can reach the Employee Assistance Program at **1-877-371-9978**.
- Seek information from reliable news sources only.
- Reminder to use precautions as outlined by Health Canada – **Wear a mask, wash your hands, cover your mouth during coughs and sneezes, stay home if you are sick.**
- Self-care is critical as worries worsen if we are not looking out for ourselves.

- OPTIONS NORTHWEST Pandemic team meets regularly to address any new announcements, provide updates and to ensure adequate supplies/other necessities are in place.

We are doing everything possible currently to keep safe options available to support people in need of care. We will continue to monitor all the developments of COVID-19 and will continue to inform you of further changes to our services. If you have any questions or concerns, please call 807-344-4994 or email general@optionsnorthwest.com.

On behalf of the Pandemic Team, stay healthy and safe !!!

And Thank You!!!!