

COVID-19: UPDATE ON OUR SERVICES OPTIONS NORTHWEST

Service Update #5, 2021

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

March 1, 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.

Overview of recent orders.....

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.

Effective February 10th, 2021, Premier Ford announced continuation of the shutdown under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. While the emergency order will cease, the shutdown continues to be in effect for all of Ontario however has different timeframes for different regions. For the Thunder Bay area, this is anticipated to be in place until at least Tuesday February 16th, 2021.

Effective February 16th, 2021, Premier Ford announces COVID-19 response framework, Keeping Ontario safe and open. Thunder Bay is deemed to be in the RED ZONE with specific limits enforced in each of the zones. For full disclosure of this information, go to <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-response-framework-keeping-ontario-safe-and-open>

Effective March 1, 2021, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Office of Health, is activating an “emergency brake” in Thunder Bay District health Unit to move the region to Grey-Lockdown effective March 1, 2021. This will remain in effect for up to 2 weeks.

****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 the time we are in the Grey- Lock down zone, 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 indoors and outdoors as per our direction from December 15th and now with the declaration of us being in the Grey-Lock down zone, continue to be suspended until at least March 15th, 2021. The only exception to this is that family/friends may go for a short walk while wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. Those at end of life/palliative or very ill are exempt from this direction however arrangements need to go through a supervisor. No indoor organized public events and social gatherings, except with members of the same household are allowed in Grey-lock down zone.**
- **All employees must wear both a surgical/procedural mask AND a face shield or goggles while working within the congregate care setting or doing face to face interactions in the community.** The only exception to this is during employee mealtimes when the employee is **eating and strictly maintaining social distancing.** 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. **Social distancing in meeting rooms/offices is required and strictly enforced and sharing a space to have lunch together is not recommended at this time. Employees accessing the buildings after hours or on weekends are required to wear masks and properly screen including temperature taking.**
- 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 and non-essential visitors will be screened for symptoms and taking of temperatures as they attend any OPTIONS NORTHWEST location. **All visitors essential or non-essential, must wear both a surgical mask and face shield or goggles when entering a congregate setting. We must provide them if they do not have them upon entry to the home. Visitors MUST complete the screening questions or access should be denied.**
- All attendance at public/crowded venues for recreation is prohibited until further notice.

- Going for a walk, is **NOT cancelled**.
- 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. **While new Grey-lock down rules are allowing businesses to remain open, we are NOT recommending supporting people to go to the mall etc.**
- All in person training is currently on hold 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 **cancelled**.
- 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.
- 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. Get vaccinated when your turn comes.**
- 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!!!!