



## MEMORANDUM

To: All Employees of OPTIONS NORTHWEST

From: Anna-Marie Eckensweiler, Executive Director

Date: May 28, 2020

Re: Updates; Extension of Emergency Orders, Use of Masks for Individuals supported, Updated Reference Document for Symptoms and Pandemic pay update  
**PLEASE PUT IN COVID-19 BINDER and USE the LAMINATED version for posting.**

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Hope this memo finds you continuing to stay well during these uncertain times. We are appreciative of all of your hard work and efforts to keep yourselves healthy as well as the individuals we support. Today's memo has a number of updates. If you have any questions, please speak to your immediate supervisor or another member of the management team.

- On May 27, the Ontario government expressed that they wish to continue to protect the health and safety of the public during the COVID-19 outbreak by extending all emergency orders. This includes continued closure of outdoor playgrounds, play structures and equipment, public swimming pools and outdoor water facilities, as well as bars and restaurants except for takeout and delivery. There are continued restrictions on social gatherings of no more than five (5) people and staff deployment rules remain in place for long-term care homes and congregate settings. Single employer status remains in effect. So while we saw a little loosening of the restrictions the Mother's Day weekend, the government has been concerned with the higher incident of cases of COVID in the province therefore has now enforced the extension of the emergency orders to keep people at home. **I had already previously mentioned that while things like some stores have opened up, I cautioned that is more to get the economy going again and we want to continue to not put vulnerable people at risk.** The public health unit recommends anyone with compromised immune systems to remain at home. We continue to make the same recommendation to stay at home with the individuals we support. Walks, getting out in the yard are activities that can be done but **please don't take anyone into stores for shopping.** Going out for the people we support should only be for **essential visits/appointments.**
- Once the province starts to open up for more regular business, and the individuals we support start to go out, the recommendation from Ontario Public Health is to wear a non-medical mask. We have attached an information sheet on the Do's and Don'ts of wearing a mask when physical distancing is a challenge. One of the most important points in this document is under the heading..... **Do NOT place a mask on children under the age of two years or anyone who can't take it off on their own.** Masks may pose a hazard to some of the individuals we support who cannot take off their own mask or who cannot verbalize there is an issue with breathing when wearing the mask. Masks should only be worn by those who are able to take off on their own. And while cloth masks are acceptable for these circumstances, we are recommending the use of Level 1 non-medical disposable masks for the individuals. In reviewing all of the recommendations for use of cloth masks, we were concerned that if someone took theirs off and it was picked up by another person, this would pose some challenges. The use of disposable masks should

simplify this as they can be disposed of in the event masks get accidentally picked up by someone else and would eliminate the washing of cloth masks. At this time, the wearing of disposable masks by individuals is recommended when going out to public places whereby social/physical distancing cannot be achieved. A laminated version of the instructions attached will be provided to all locations. We are asking employees to help instruct individuals who can wear a mask to do so properly and to perform hand hygiene when putting on and taking off the masks. If employees require assistance with giving this guidance to individuals we support, please tell your immediate supervisor as we will arrange extra assistance for this purpose.

For those who cannot wear a mask, employees should be aware that the general public may make some unkind comments as they may feel we are ignoring the recommendations of public health. It is your role to support the individual in the community once it re-opens up to address this criticism. While it really is no one's business, COVID-19 has sometimes brought out the "public police" who often make uninformed comments when they don't really know the situation.

We also recommend you don't get into power struggles with individuals that refuse to wear masks.

Continue to educate about good hand hygiene, social distancing, and all of the other recommended efforts to keep people safe and healthy. We have ordered extra masks for this purpose however at this time, Level 1 masks are available in all locations.

- I have also attached the **Ministry of Health's updated document COVID-19 Reference Document of Symptoms version 5.0**. Over the course of the pandemic, the ministry has updated the "other" symptoms of COVID-19. The three common symptoms of COVID-19 have not changed: fever, new or worsening cough and shortness of breath. However, as they have learned more about this virus, they have shared other symptoms and atypical symptoms. We are providing these to you for your knowledge of the people we support to be aware of as well as for your own screening. As you screen daily for your shifts, we advise that if you are having any symptoms of illness, that you follow OPTIONS policy of staying home until you are symptom free for 24 hours.
- And last but not least we received some information May 27<sup>th</sup> that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services will be engaging with us in early June about the flow of the pandemic funding. While the government made the announcement back on April 25<sup>th</sup> to commit to the pandemic pay for front line employees, we have been advocating for more information on how it is to be paid out and when the funding will be flowed to do so. We appreciate your patience during this time as OPTIONS like many other agencies are in the same boat that this information has not been forthcoming. We will hopefully be able to confirm these arrangements in June.

We are appreciative of all of your efforts and know that during this pandemic period it has been a challenge to stay well and healthy amidst this virus. We also know that wearing a mask for long periods on shift can be uncomfortable and we applaud your efforts with all that you are contending with.

Stay well!!



Anna-Marie Eckensweiler on behalf of the Pandemic Team.