MEDIA RELEASE

Northwestern
Health Unit
www.nwhu.on.ca

For immediate release

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COVID-19 Reporting by NWHU: Why We Report the Way We Do

To further protect privacy, Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) has recently changed the way positive test results for COVID-19 are reported.

The work of public health is to protect the health of our communities. We do that in many ways, which includes providing people with information about possible risks to their health and how they can respond to those risks. We also connect with people who may have an infectious disease to make sure they know how to take care of themselves and protect the people around them from getting sick.

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to maintain physical distance from anyone outside your social circle, wear a mask when physical distancing is difficult, wash your hands frequently, and avoid touching your face.

NWHU advises caution and notes that relying on local positive test results to start taking precautions is not an effective way to protect yourself. Some people with COVID-19 do not show symptoms, so they might never get tested, even though they may spread the disease. As well, for those who do get tested, they may have been infectious before being tested. Waiting for a known test result is too late for prevention, which is why NWHU has said to assume that COVID-19 is in your community and take the appropriate precautions at all times.

After receiving a positive test result for COVID-19, NWHU and its partners follow-up with the individual involved to make sure that they know how to prevent any further spread of the illness. People are supported to self-isolate for 14 days, and we work with them to identify anyone they might have been in close contact with who might be at risk. If there is a risk to the general public, NWHU will let the public know through regular and social media.

NWHU has connected with hundreds of individuals and dozens of community officials when working with the local cases identified to date. There has been no evidence to date in our catchment area of anyone outside of the case's household being infected by a case. This is a direct result of the actions of NWHU and the individuals who have tested positive acting responsibly. The system is working and there is low activity in our region.

Consistent with the *Personal Health Information Protection Act (2004)*, NWHU does not release information to the public that may identify an individual, including the location of the residence of people who test positive for COVID-19. We report case numbers by general area on our website and to the media. Ensuring privacy protects individuals from the negative stigma associated with COVID-19. Negative stigma about COVID-19 status can lead to some people being harassed and ostracized at a time when they should be supported and applauded for taking care to prevent further infection.

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NWHU's website at www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19 is updated by noon, Monday to Friday, with local statistics and also includes all the information people need to learn how to protect themselves from COVID-19. In addition, we offer public Q&A sessions and regular media briefings with our Medical Officer of Health to ensure that the public gets their questions answered from a credible source.

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Visit Ontario's website to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

A reminder to the media that Dr. Kit Young-Hoon hosts online COVID-19 media briefings every Tuesday, 10:00 am - 11:00 am CT as well as Q&A sessions for the public every Wednesday, 10:00 am - 11:00 am CT. If you do not have a link to the media briefings, please email jbegg@nwhu.on.ca.