

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

August 25, 2020

Health unit clarifies mask requirements

Northwestern Health Unit is clarifying its requirement that local businesses and organizations have a mask policy.

Medical Officer of Health **Dr. Kit Young-Hoon** says the requirement is meant to increase mask use in the community by asking everyone who comes into an enclosed public space to wear a mask. Dr Young-Hoon says, “specifically, our Letter of Instruction requires that owners and operators of enclosed public spaces have a policy that they will ask all people coming into their space to wear a mask or face covering.”

Privately-owned businesses can legally refuse to serve anyone for any reason that does not contravene the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, or other legislation. Organizations may have additional restrictions on when and how they can refuse service.

“Each business and organization should use common sense when enforcing its mask policy”, says Dr Young-Hoon. NWHU reminds everyone that there are reasons that some people cannot wear a mask. The person might have a medical condition or disability that you cannot see, or may not be able to wear a mask for religious or cultural reasons.

The persons who are exempt from wearing a mask or face covering as defined in the Letter of Instruction are covered under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, or other legislation. Those exempt from the policy should not be refused service, and NWHU also recommends that people not be asked to provide proof of exemption. NWHU says that the policy should be implemented and enforced in ‘good faith’ and should be used as a means to encourage and educate people about mask or face covering use in enclosed public spaces.

“We also know that wearing masks in public spaces is a significant change”, says Dr Young-Hoon, “and some people may simply refuse to wear a mask, putting owners and operators in a difficult position.” The health unit is not asking businesses and organizations to take any action that might put their staff at risk of a physical confrontation to enforce their mask policy.

“Our goal is to make wearing a mask part of the new normal to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We’d like to see 90 to 95 percent of people wearing masks or cloth face coverings in enclosed public spaces”, Dr Young-Hoon states.

Businesses and organizations must do what they think is best, and in any situation where owners and operators or their staff feel they are in an unsafe situation, it’s best to contact police for assistance.

MEDIA RELEASE



Northwestern
Health Unit

www.nwhu.on.ca

Media Contact:

Kit Young-Hoon

Medical Officer of Health
Northwestern Health Unit
210 First Street North
Kenora, ON P9N 2K4
(807) 468-3147

jbegg@nwhu.on.ca

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 Thursday, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm CT. If you do not have a link to the media briefings, please email jbegg@nwhu.on.ca.