

# Coordinated COVID-19 Response Newsletter

May 15, 2020

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep local stakeholders informed about the coordinated response to the evolving COVID-19 situation. The Region, area municipalities and local community partners are meeting regularly to make sure our pandemic response efforts are coordinated and aligned. This work is being done through a Regional Pandemic Control Group which coordinates the efforts and actions of five other sector control groups which are described further in this document.

## Regional Pandemic Control Group (RPCG)

The Regional Pandemic Control Group has been meeting regularly to share information, facilitate sharing of resources, and guide the community-wide pandemic response in five areas: health, community support, critical infrastructure, the municipalities and communications. The following sections provide an update on these five areas that are working together to ensure an effective and efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic in our community.



<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/covid-19-information-centre.aspx>

## 1. Health Sector Control Group (HSCG)

The Region of Waterloo Public Health continues to work closely with local hospitals, health care partners, the Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario and many community partners to respond to [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) in Waterloo Region.

**COVID-19 Dashboard:** Public Health continues to refine the COVID-19 dashboard on the Region's website: [www.regionofwaterloo.ca/COVID19summary](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/COVID19summary). This Dashboard illustrates the trends and is updated daily at 10:30 a.m.

### Public Health Measures

Community spread appears to be stabilizing or slowing down in Waterloo region and across Ontario. As the Province begins to relax restrictions, we must stay vigilant in taking appropriate precautions to protect ourselves and our families. These precautions include:

- avoiding gatherings; maintaining physical distancing (2m);
- washing your hands thoroughly and often;
- staying home when feeling unwell even if symptoms are mild; and limiting the number of times you go out.



In addition, it is recommended that people consider the use of non-medical masks (e.g. cloth masks or face coverings), especially if they anticipate being in situations where maintaining physical distancing isn't possible. However, it is important to remember that you have to be careful with masks; limit the number of times you touch your own face (e.g. to adjust the mask); practice diligent handwashing, before and after manipulating your mask; and be careful that the mask does not give you a false sense of security—it cannot be relied on to protect you from COVID-19. Please remember that medical-grade masks and respirators must be reserved for health-care workers.

### **Expanded Testing for Symptomatic Residents**

Over the past few weeks we have been working with our clinical testing partners to be ready to expand testing in our community. Beginning May 15, as per Provincial guidance, all residents with symptoms will be eligible for testing. We have completed “whole home” testing of all long-term care facilities—which means that we now have capacity to test more residents. There are 5 assessment centres in the Region: 3 located at the area hospitals and 2 community assessment centres. Information on their locations, hours of operation, etc. will be available very shortly on our updated webpage. All assessment centres take referrals from primary care physicians.

The Province has also worked hard to expand testing capacity across Ontario and improve the overall lab system. The Province has indicated that labs have the capacity for this expanded testing.

### **e-Health Centre of Excellence's/ Ontario Health West's Self-Assessment Tool**

We are updating the link on our [website](#) to access Ontario's online self-assessment tool, the link will take you to the [Ontario Health West COVID-19](#) self-assessment tool (covid19checkup.ca), courtesy of the eHealth Centre of Excellence for Waterloo Region and Ontario Health West. This assessment asks the same questions as the one created by the Ministry of Health, but it now has the capability to virtually connect patients with a primary care provider if they require a medical follow-up. The process is quick, clear and straightforward. After the virtual appointment you may be referred to an assessment centre. This is great news because this new tool can help residents connect to their own primary care provider (if they choose to participate) or, for those who don't have a primary care provider or are having difficulty accessing one during this pandemic, to be quickly connected to a primary care provider who can do a virtual assessment as well as a referral for testing. Thank you to the e-Health Centre of Excellence for coordinating the availability of this valuable online tool and onboarding primary health care providers in Waterloo Region.

### **COVID Dashboard for Paramedic Services, Hospitals and Central Ambulance Communications Centre**

Region of Waterloo Paramedic Service has collaborated with software developers First Watch to create a first of its kind COVID Dashboard for patient distribution in the Waterloo region. The distribution model is tied to the deployment plan which Paramedic Services supplies to Cambridge Central Ambulance Communications Centre (CACC) to determine patient destinations based on regional specialty programs and now bed availability. The overall goal for the COVID Dashboard is to assist dispatcher and Paramedic crews to have real-time situational awareness to ensure patients are transported to a facility able to ensure treatment and possible admission if required without needing to be transported to an alternate facility with capacity.

Input was sought from all area hospitals, area ED physicians in the Region of Waterloo as well as Central Ambulance Communications Centre (CACC) Cambridge, to land on the required elements needed to have a useful tool for reference when determining patient distribution amongst the 3 area hospitals. A huge thank-you to Sandra and Frances at Cambridge CACC for moving this project forward and supporting Paramedic Services in standing this up.

The dashboard, pictured below, went live on Monday May 11, 2020 at the CACC and is a first in Ontario between a Paramedic Service and First Watch.



We continue to partner with First Watch and system partners to ensure patients are receiving excellence in patient care and refining the ways in which we can assist their journey into and through the healthcare system.

We further wish to acknowledge the work completed by First Watch on this project as this was created by First Watch at no additional costs to the Region of Waterloo as well as Cambridge CACC staff for implementing on short notice.

**Translated resources:** Key COVID-19 information resources have been published in Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Farsi, French, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya and Portuguese. Resources are currently available and posted at: <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>

Additional multilingual resources are available at [www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/COVID19](http://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/COVID19)

**Who to contact if you have questions or need additional information**

Please email [publichealth@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:publichealth@regionofwaterloo.ca). This will ensure your questions are sent to an inbox that will be regularly monitored, and referred to the appropriate staff for follow-up.

## 2. Community Support Control Group (CSCG)

The Region, the area municipalities and many community partners have taken action to support the health and safety of vulnerable people affected by COVID-19. This group's mandate is to:

- Identify populations that may require additional supports during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Identify the community supports that will be provided to those populations; and
- Determine which organizations will coordinate and provide those supports.



The Community Support Control Group is addressing the following service areas: Food Services; Housing and Homelessness Services; Children's Services; Psychosocial and Spiritual Support Services; Animal Care Services. Below is this week's update from the Community Support Control Group. For more information, visit: [www.regionofwaterloo.ca/communitysupportsCOVID19](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/communitysupportsCOVID19).

### Housing and homelessness

- To date, a medical team has completed more than 2,100 COVID-19 mobile assessments for people experiencing homelessness.

### Emergency child care

- As of May 13, 228 children have been placed into Emergency Child Care; 172 children are in home child care and 56 are in child care centres.

### Food services

- Last week, 1,816 food hampers have been distributed at 15 locations throughout Waterloo Region. A food hamper is a 3-4 days' supply of food.
- 94,799 pounds of food were distributed.
- 3,635 non-perishable and perishable emergency food hampers were packed at The Food Bank.
- 88 food hamper deliveries were made to homes of individuals who are unable to leave their homes due to sickness, mobility issues or self-isolation.
- There were 109 food hamper and meal deliveries to community programs and agency partners in Waterloo Region.

### Animal care

- Since March 15, 294 animals have received emergency pet food.
- 18 animals have been provided temporary emergency care due to Covid-19.

### Psychosocial and spiritual support

- The Friendly Voice program has launched for people who are feeling lonely or isolated. This is a wellbeing check-in with a local volunteer over the phone. Please call 519-743-6333 between 8:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. if you need this service.



### 3. Critical Infrastructure Control Group (CICG)

The Region of Waterloo and area Municipalities continue to maintain all critical services and maintain legislative requirements while performing these services.

**Grand River Transit (GRT):** Grand River Transit will commence fare collection and front of the bus boarding on June 1. Customer Service locations will re open to the public in the upcoming week as well. Please stay tuned for media releases and information posted on the Grand River Transit webpage for more details.

In the interim, all GRT services continue to be free until May 31, 2020. Customers continue to be reminded to use transit for essential trips, and to board and exit through the rear doors of the bus.

**Waste Management:** The waste transfer stations at Cambridge and Waterloo will be closed for residential drop-off on Monday, May 18 for the Victoria Day holiday. Otherwise, they continue to remain operational during normal operating hours of 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday to Saturday. Gate 1 Waterloo will also be open for business drop-off on Saturdays again, during normal operating hours of 8:00 am to 1 pm.

Regular recycling and green bin collection continues as normal. Currently the every-second-week garbage bag/can limit has been temporarily increased from four to six bags due to increased household levels being put out curbside. Bulky/large item collection continues to be temporarily postponed /cancelled and a reminder for citizens that all garbage must be placed in bags in order for it to be collected.

**We continue to ask that citizens remember to respect the environment and do not dump or burn garbage or yard waste.**

**Water/Wastewater:** Water and waste water demands are trending normal for this time of year. Water Services continues to support Public Health with managing the private well testing kit process. Please see the Public Health website for more information related to this topic. The Fact Sheet and Information Graphic related to water quality concerns when reopening buildings is now posted on the [Region's website](#) and has been shared with the local municipalities.

**Capital/Construction projects:** Continue to visit the Region of Waterloo's website for new and ongoing construction projects in your area as well as any road closure information to assist you with planning your essential travels. Residents may have noticed the increase in Region and Municipal construction projects over this past week. All contractors are expected to use physical distancing and/or use appropriate personal protection equipment.



## 4. Municipal Control Group (MCG)

The CAOs of all municipalities have been meeting frequently to discuss pertinent issues and to coordinate operational decisions on the local municipal response to COVID-19. Key activities have included:

- Initiating recovery planning work to ensure an eventual safe and effective return to normal operations based on public health guidance and the Ontario Government's Plan to Reopen the Province.
- Coordinating the relaxation of rules governing the usage of open spaces in parks.
- Working with local farmer's markets to plan for their safe reopening.
- Overseeing the preparation of criteria to support decision-making around the appropriate point at which to end the declared emergency.
- Coordinating common public messaging around fireworks regulations and safety for the Victoria Day weekend.
- Developing recommendations for a second phase of efforts to provide local economic development support for affected residents and business in conjunction with Federal and Provincial aid.
- Working with the Business and Economic Support Team of Waterloo Region (BESTWR).
- Continuing discussions with leaders in the non-profit sector around how to mobilize and align philanthropists and foundations to address social and economic needs in the community.

## 5. Communications Control Group (CCG)

The Communications Control Group (CCG) meets weekly to share relevant information about COVID-19 communications. The group is comprised of communication leaders from public sector organizations across Waterloo Region (hospitals, municipalities, school boards, post-secondary, police, BESTWR, etc.) At the May 13 meeting, the CCG discussed:

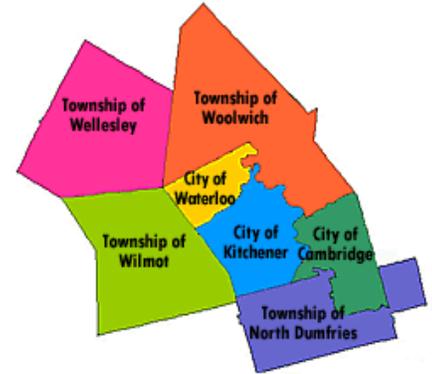
- Working together to share consistent messages through social and media releases related to:
  - Relaxing restrictions at parks
  - Smart Waterloo Region working with school boards to improve connectivity for families to help with distance learning.
  - Messages coming out of Community Services Support Control Group (e.g. help for people in crisis, resources for people experiencing loss and grief, spiritual support, meal delivery for residents with low income, etc.)
  - Water quality messages and flushing instructions for businesses that are reopening.
- Internal communications related to return to work, including consistent signage for municipal facilities.
- Continuing to communicate messages about maintaining health measures as businesses and workplaces begin to reopen.

Public Health and Corporate Communication teams continue to share important COVID-19 information with media, residents and staff through our website, social media accounts and regular media briefings.

**Note:** the media briefing on Victoria Day (May 18) has been cancelled. Briefings for the upcoming week will be held on May 19 and 22.

## Municipal Services

All municipalities in Waterloo region are continuing to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. The region and all area municipalities have made significant changes to services and programming. Closures, cancellations, news releases, important contacts, and frequently asked questions can be found on the following websites:



### Region of Waterloo Response to COVID-19

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/covid-19-information-centre.aspx>

### City of Cambridge's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.cambridge.ca/en/your-city/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>

### City of Kitchener's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.kitchener.ca/en/city-services/storm-and-emergency-updates.aspx#>

### City of Waterloo's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.waterloo.ca/en/living/covid-19-response.aspx#>

### Township of North Dumfries' Response to COVID-19

<https://www.northdumfries.ca/en/index.aspx>

### Township of Wellesley's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.wellesley.ca/en/living-here/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19.aspx#>

### Township of Wilmot's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.wilmot.ca/en/living-here/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>

### Township of Woolwich Response to COVID-19

<https://www.woolwich.ca/en/township-services/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>

**Complaints about compliance to COVID-19 orders should be directed to the [Region of Waterloo Call Center](#) – 24 hours / 7 days per week at 519-575-4400**



## Community Partner Updates

The community is coming together to respond and address the impacts of COVID 19. The following are some examples of this coordinated response.

### **Providing Internet Access to support E-Learning in Waterloo Region**

Smart Waterloo Region (SWR), in partnership with four local charitable foundations, has successfully secured enough money to cover internet costs for the students of 1,500 families in the Region.

With the abrupt closure of schools in the Region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) have been working to find ways to support e-learning for their students. As a part of this effort, 1,500 households in the Region were identified as requiring financial support in order to provide children and youth with access to technology to support their e-learning needs.

Thanks to the contributions of four local partners – The Cowan Foundation, The Fairmount Foundation, Astley Family Foundation, and Lyle S. Hallman Foundation – access to the internet through devices like hot spots and high-speed modems, and monthly service fees, will be covered through until the end of summer.

The internet assistance is currently in the process of being deployed to families in need through WRDSB and WCDSB. The technology will help children and youth access e-learning and mental health resources, as well as other virtual programming.

### **Business and Economic Support Team Waterloo Region (BESTWR)**

Since its formation in late March, BESTWR, which includes 84 members across the Leadership Team, four committees and five industry specific sub-committees, has been very active in the areas of government advocacy and supporting local companies during this crisis response. Some of the key highlights include three advocacy letters to the Prime Minister and the Premier of Ontario, discussions with 1400+ local businesses and organizations, assisting with sourcing local PPE and medical supplies, new “findmyjob.ca” local job portal, a virtual job fair, and thousands of online interactions with the business community through webinars, Covid-19 Resource websites, blogs and editorials.

### **Help the Region of Waterloo Museums write history!**

The Covid-19 pandemic is changing the way we live our lives and our community is responding in remarkable ways. Region of Waterloo Museums are looking for the public's help in recording accounts of everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic for future generations. Our community is making history, help us to capture it as a permanent part of Waterloo Region's history! And the best time to start collecting those stories is NOW. Share your stories, artwork, photographs or videos by emailing them to [helpusmakehistory@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:helpusmakehistory@regionofwaterloo.ca). Staff may be in touch for more information after you post or email. Visit our "[Help us Make History](#)" pages on our websites for more information.

## Friendly Voice

Could you use a friendly chat? The Friendly Voice program is a general wellbeing check-in that provides social connection to reduce loneliness and isolation in the community. It was developed in response to COVID-19 impacts on the community.

To register for the Friendly Voice program, please call 519-743-6333 and ask reception how to get started! Reception hours are 8:30am-6pm, but Friendly Voice hours may vary. To print or download the poster for distribution purposes click here. If you are in crisis, please call Here 24/7 1-844-437-3247, or 9-1-1.

CARIZON  
family + community services

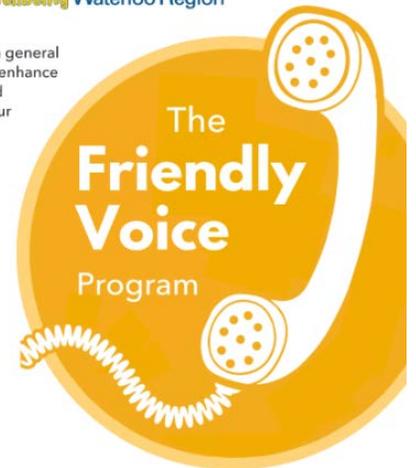
Wellbeing Waterloo Region

The Friendly Voice is a general wellbeing check-in to enhance social connections and reduce loneliness in our community.

### How To Register

To register for the Friendly Voice program, please call 519-743-6333 ask reception how to get started!

Reception is open 8:30 am-6:00 pm, but Friendly Voice session times may vary.



**Free over the phone support for anyone in the Waterloo Region who's feeling isolated or lonely.**

## Grief, Dying, and Death During a Pandemic

A new resource entitled "[Grief, Dying and Death during a Pandemic](#)" is now available on the Wellbeing Waterloo Region website. The purpose of the resource is to offer emotional support and practical ideas for all of us in Waterloo Region as we experience grief, as we accompany someone who is dying, or as we find our way during the days following someone's death. The authors include practitioners in the areas of social work, palliative care, counseling, bereavement, spiritual care, and death education. To download or print the new pdf version click here: <http://www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Grief-dying-and-death-during-a-pandemic-v4.pdf>

## Calendar of COVID-19 adapted events, activities and services

Many of our partners and other community organizations have adjusted their services in response to COVID-19 and are offering online activities, services and events. To find out about COVID related services visit the following websites:

- Immigrants and refugees - <https://calendar.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/default/Month>
- Children, youth, families and parents - <https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/calendar/>
- Wellbeing Waterloo Region - <http://www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/calendar/>

## Public fireworks during Victoria Day

Area municipalities across the Region, are reminding residents to keep safety top of mind this Victoria Day. To meet physical distancing guidelines, public firework displays will not be permitted, and public events have been cancelled across the region for the May long weekend (May 16-18). Fireworks cannot be set off in municipal parks, sports fields, laneways, or on school board property. Additionally, residents are encouraged to exercise caution with private backyard firework displays. This is due to provincially-imposed limitations on gatherings of more than 5 people not part of the same household as well as the possibility of tying up emergency resources. Residents are asked to keep celebrations small and only to those within their household and consider the possibility of celebrating the holiday in different ways this year. Please note that municipal by-law officers will be enforcing current public health restrictions.