Public Health Interventions to Support Safe Re-opening

The Grey Bruce Health Unit’s ultimate goal is to achieve safe re-opening as fast as possible while still maintaining the successful control over the outbreak and community transmission of Covid-19 to ensure the health and safety of the population.

This can be achieved with a balanced approach to any decision related to public health measures. Mass gathering types of events pose a high risk of transmission due to failure of participants to follow recommendations. If an uncontrollable mass gathering on a beach is expected, such as during holiday long-weekends, we encourage the municipality to consider the least intrusive measures for the shortest period of time to prevent such uncontrollable mass gathering. One of these measures could be a by-law to modify access to beaches. Modified access can vary from restricting the number of people, limiting permitted activities, and up to and including the complete closure of a beach. If complete closure is warranted, best practice is for the shortest period of time (1-3 days). The decision on the level of the measure to be undertaken is based upon the municipality’s unique circumstances. If education and communication suffice, limiting access may not be needed.

Municipalities have the right to pass by-laws stricter than provincial orders including access to beaches. The success of a by-law as a public health measure requires a thorough consultation with Public Health to ensure scientific and epidemiological evidence are factored in. The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Arra, and the staff of the Grey Bruce Health Unit have been, and remain available, for consultation to any municipal council in Grey and Bruce Counties. Dr. Arra always identifies communication as key in the success of public health measures and as such recommends sufficient
and proactive communication with involved stakeholders including federal and provincial
decision makers, enforcement agencies, and specific sectors that are impacted.

It is important to consider the multiple health concerns that come into play when
deciding on any public health measure. The objective during the Recovery Phase of the
pandemic management is to ensure a balanced approach minimizing both disease and
death from COVID-19, and disease and death from measures to respond to COVID-19.

As an example, closing beaches may reduce the risk of COVID-19, but it has the
potential to increase disease and death related to other conditions such as mental
health, domestic violence, and heat injury during heatwaves; especially for those who
cannot afford an air-conditioned environment. Having the natural cooling effect of a
beach would prevent heat-related injury and death. This effect becomes more vital as
providing cooling centers during COVID-19 has its unique set of challenges.

Also important is income as a key Social Determinants of Health. “Indefinite” closure of
some beaches, activities, or facilities, would negatively affect health by risking the job
security and income of individuals who are employed in a sector impacted by the
closure. Having clear timelines allows employers to plan accordingly to ensure job
certainty for their employees.

Beach closure may, or may not, be successful in preventing people from coming to a
community and posing the risk of congregating in other locales other than the beach.
However, it may inadvertently create other challenges, for example, a long line of
people waiting inside a store to purchase ice-cream may carry more risk than spending
time on a beach. Closure without strong communication and buy-in from stakeholders
may lead to protests with the associated potential to increase the risk of transmission.

People’s respect and adherence to the provincial orders and public health
recommendations are what makes our area one of the safest parts of the province. We
expect beachgoers to exercises the same level of compliance. There are many methods
to ensure this compliance whether be it education, communication, enforcement,
modified access among others.
It is of critical importance to continue to support the ultimate goal of safe re-opening as fast as possible, while still maintaining the successful control over the community transmission of Covid-19 to ensure the health and safety of the population. The Grey Bruce Health Unit has been investing efforts with all stakeholders including municipalities and businesses in Grey and Bruce Counties to ensure safe re-opening; our positive epidemiological data reflects the success of these efforts and allows us to move forward.

Regardless of the situation, we strongly recommend that all individuals comply with the provincial orders and the municipal by-laws.

For More Information:
Dr. Ian Arra
Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer
To arrange to speak with Dr. Arra, please contact Drew Ferguson at:
519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456 ext. 1269
d.ferguson@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca