

WDG Public Health issues work-from-home order as of Dec. 20

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Medical Officer of Health and CEO for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health, Dr. Nicola Mercer, has issued an order instructing businesses to allow employees to work from home where reasonable.

The notice was announced by WDG Public Health last Thursday (Dec. 16) and went into effect as of Monday (Dec. 20).

"Each person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall ensure that any person who performs work for the business or organization conducts their work remotely, unless the nature of their work requires them to be on-site at the workplace," said Mercer in the release of the order.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health reported the first local case of the Omicron variant on Dec. 10 and has since seen multiple confirmed cases of the variant resulting in schools closing and moving to online learning, and isolation of youth hockey teams.

"With the growing presence of the Omicron variant, now is the time to protect our progress," said Mercer. "As we enter the holiday season with a rising case count, we must take action and utilize proven public health measures such as limiting social interaction to ensure our schools remain open and we limit the strain on our local businesses during one of their most important time of the year."

Although businesses have been instructed to enable remote work for employees, the order does not apply to any government operations or delivery of services. Also exempted from the order is any person, public-funded agency, or organization that delivers or supports government operations and services including those of the health care sector.

For those who can't work remotely, Mercer has suggested limiting the gathering of workers as much as possible by utilizing virtual options for meetings, ensuring physical distancing in break rooms as well as other location where employee may eat or drink. She also recommended staggering lunches and breaks.

The instructions issued by Mercer will be enforced by public health officials and by provincial offences officers.

Failure to comply with the order may lead to penalties including fines, imprisonment, and/or closure of the premise.

While the remote order went into effect on Dec. 20, Mercer noted that she can't provide an end date for the instructions.

"My current expectation, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is that they will be in place over the holiday season," said Mercer. "It is not possible at this time to account for the potential impact of the Omicron variant of concern, about which much is currently being learned. I may amend these instructions (if and as required) and will rescind them as soon I determine they are no longer necessary."

WDG Public Health reported 106 active cases of COVID-19 in Dufferin County, more than half of which are reported in Orangeville, the day the order went into effect.