

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

With the holidays upon us and 2020 winding down, I would like to take a moment to reflect on this past year.

There is no doubt that it has been a challenging year for all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic has required us to change the way we do things and interact with one another. From inconveniences such as wearing masks, to waiting in lines to enter buildings, to having to keep a distance from others, it's been stressful and frustrating. It has been especially hard on our families and relationships as we've had to find other ways to juggle family, school and work, and to stay connected with those we care about. For too many, the year has also brought hardship and tragedy, from lost financial stability to lost loved ones who have perished from the coronavirus. In our community, as well as across the globe, COVID-19 has taken a large toll.

In spite of the challenges we've faced, our community has largely come together to help protect one another from the spread of the virus, following public health precautions such as masking and social distancing when out in public, and finding alternative ways to connect with loved ones and to look out for each other. Many of our local businesses, schools and healthcare workers have made extraordinary efforts to prevent spread of the virus. Collectively, our efforts have helped avoid uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 in our community, and for this I am extremely grateful.

However, we are at a critical point in the second wave of this pandemic. The EOHU region has experienced a significant increase in COVID-19 cases over recent weeks. As we have seen with other areas of the province, community spread can accelerate rapidly and threaten healthcare capacity in hospitals and other services that we all rely on. Uncontrolled spread can also threaten the local economy by forcing the shutdown of businesses as a last resort to stop the spread of the virus. And as we know too well in our own region, it can have devastating consequences for our most vulnerable residents.

While we are all experiencing pandemic fatigue and yearning for a return to better days, it is imperative to continue following public health precautions if we hope to keep COVID cases at a manageable level in our community.

For this reason, **I am urging residents to consider ways to celebrate the holidays safely this season.** In the holiday spirit of kindness, compassion and generosity towards our community – and in the hopes for a better 2021 – following public health guidelines will be extremely important over the coming weeks so that we don't experience a post-holiday surge of COVID cases that puts people's lives, health and livelihood at risk.

We can celebrate safely while protecting our loved ones and our community by limiting in-person celebrations to the people we live with, or with one other household if you live alone. There are also [many creative ways](#) to celebrate the holidays safely with family and friends that we don't live with, such as having virtual gatherings, and sharing meals or opening gifts together online. We can also help keep everyone safe by limiting trips into the community to essential errands only and staying

home when we aren't feeling well. When we are out in public, we should continue to avoid crowds, wear our masks, keep 2 metres distance from others and clean our hands regularly.

In spite of the year's hardships, 2020 is drawing to an end with reason for optimism – vaccines are on the horizon which will help reduce the impact of COVID-19 and allow for the gradual return to more normal activities. In the meantime, let's continue to follow public health precautions and keep our loved ones and our community safe so that we can look forward together to better times in 2021.

For more on how to celebrate safely, and how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, visit the Eastern Ontario Health Unit's website at www.EOHU.ca.

Wishing everyone health and happiness this holiday season.

Dr. Paul Roumeliotis
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For more information about this letter, please send your request to media@eohu.ca.