



The holiday season is here and as we prepare to celebrate cherished religious or cultural traditions, have festive gatherings with coworkers, family and friends, limit our exposure to Mariah Carey’s “All I want for Christmas is You” song in pharmacies and grocery stores, we should also be mindful to reduce the risk of communicable diseases as much as possible, especially in high-risk congregate living settings, to keep our residents/clients, staff and visitors safe. This includes holiday decorations and hosting events that will be attended by multiple family members of residents/clients during the holiday season. There are already risk factors associated with decorations when it comes to fire safety that should be assessed and mitigated.

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened concerns about infection prevention and control that placed seasonal decorations under further scrutiny as a potential source of infection. Although decorations do not pose a high risk of transmission, they may harbour dust and microorganisms. The guidelines that have shown to be prudent in the past few years should be implemented this year too to celebrate the holiday season safely and responsibly. Below are some of the IPAC recommendations for holiday festivities and decorations applicable to most health care and congregate living settings.

DECORATION SELECTION AND DISPLAY

- Low to no-touch decorations (such as Christmas trees, wreaths, and wall decorations) are preferred seasonal decorations to limit contact transmission. All decorations that may be touched by residents or clients must be wipeable or cleanable.
- Choose laminated/plastic/wipeable decorations whenever possible that can be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- Decorations should be placed using adhesives that are easy to remove and do not leave residues.



- Decorations are best in locations that are out of public reach or under continuous view of staff to monitor for any handling concerns.
- Decorations should not interfere with regular clinical or housekeeping duties, and should not obstruct signages, access to PPE, or hand hygiene dispensers.
- Avoid placing holiday decorations on horizontal and high-touched surfaces (such as hand rails), work station on wheels, and medication rooms. Residents/families may choose to decorate their room (e.g., cards) but staff should advise to minimize clutter and not to place decorations on window sills or table tops to allow for adequate environmental cleaning.
- The integrity of ceiling tiles must not be compromised by hanging decorations or signs. Avoid lifting ceiling tiles to hang items.
- Decorations should be displayed and removed in a timely manner to prevent dust buildup.
- Perform hand hygiene before and after handling decorations.

COSTUMES AND CELEBRATIONS

- If appropriate to the care setting, a costume may be worn by staff if it does not interfere with practicing hand hygiene or the use of any personal protective equipment.
- Special character visits (Santa, Super Heroes, the ampersand etc.) should avoid direct contact with residents and clients if gloves are part of the costume and cannot be removed for hand hygiene. In addition, entry to rooms on Additional Precautions should not be allowed.
- At present, there are no COVID-specific requirements or restrictions related to communal dining. Based on the enhanced measures announced by Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) and Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) in first week of November 2023, it is **strongly recommended** that visitors and caregivers in long-term care and retirement homes wear masks in resident areas indoors except when with the resident in the resident's room or when eating or drinking with the resident in communal areas.
- Caregivers and general visitors may join a resident in sharing a meal or eating and drinking in a communal space without a mask during holiday gatherings. However, this should be done at the discretion of the home or organization based on their IPAC risk assessment.

As indicated in SMDHU's Public Health Alert from November 27th, there is high level of COVID-19 and RSV activity at present in the Simcoe Muskoka region, with test percent positivity of 21% and 18% respectively. Flu activity remains low for now but is expected to increase in the next few weeks. It is strongly recommended to use multiple layers of protection such as wearing a mask, staying up to date with vaccinations, not coming to work when sick, regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces, and practice good hand hygiene to mitigate the risk of transmission and have a safe holiday season.



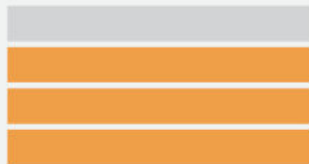
ONTARIO RESPIRATORY VIRUS TOOL - NOVEMBER 12-18, 2023

Public Health Ontario | Santé publique Ontario

COVID-19

Percent positivity:

High



Weekly indicator change:

Higher



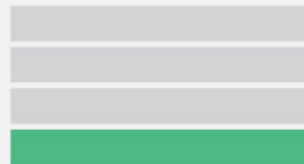
Percent positivity:



Influenza

Percent positivity:

Low



Weekly indicator change:

Higher



Percent positivity:



COVID-19 Community Risk

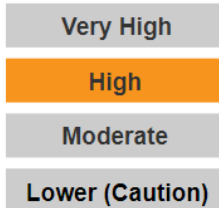
[CLICK HERE](#)

For the date of:

18 November, 2023

Seasonal Comparison

Overall Risk Level



Trend



For the week ending November 18, 2023:

The overall COVID-19 Risk Level is **High**

Compared to the previous week COVID-19 activity is *increasing*.

HISTORICAL TREND OF INFLUENZA IN SIMCOE MUSKOKA

