

# 'Don't shut down': health unit and CMHA speak to COVID-19 stress

*Sarah Sobanski*

The first line of defence against being overwhelmed by the chaos that is the COVID-19 outbreak is to have the right information.

That's according to local Canadian Mental Health Association director of programs Gord Langill and Dr. Lynn Noseworthy, medical officer of health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit.

"We are finding that the better informed people are than the more realistic their concerns are," says Langill. "Speculation can be dangerous. It can be wild. You can imagine anything happening."

Inaccurate reports, snake oil cures and COVID-19 scams are running amok from the internet to word-of-mouth. Checking up on your facts can help bring the COVID-19 outbreak into perspective.

You can find accurate, reputable information through your [local health unit](#), the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [Infection Prevention and Control Canada](#), [the city](#) and accredited news organizations such as [mykawartha.com](#).

Noseworthy points out that the World Health Organization's upgrading the COVID-19 outbreak to a pandemic speaks to the spread of the disease and not the severity. She says the declaration of a pandemic shouldn't increase fears.

"The majority of people who test positive for COVID-19 are experiencing mild symptoms and are recovering fully," she says. "We know that people are experiencing heightened anxiety due to COVID-19 and we want to reassure them. This declaration should not increase those fears."

As of March 18 there were [two confirmed cases of COVID-19](#) within the health unit's jurisdiction. [Peterborough Public Health was also reporting two cases](#). Three of the four cases are related to direct travel. The fourth is close contact to one of the travellers. There is an increased risk for those who've travelled abroad, those who are 65-plus and those with compromised immune symptoms.

"It plays a role to have credible information and to go to those sources to get the facts about what is going on," she adds.

Langill says you can also look at how the virus is transmitted, symptoms and more — the more information you have the easier it will be to manage anxiety.

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But it's also important to mitigate the amount of negative information you're taking

on, he adds. "There's still a lot of great things going on and a lot of great stories that people can share."

With much of the outside world becoming inaccessible as businesses close and people stay indoors to slow the spread of the virus, Langill says staying connected with others is imperative.

"Ongoing isolation could be a new issue," he says noting there's no telling how long the outbreak will play out.

Social distancing doesn't need to mean we stop talking to each other. You can adapt how you communicate with family and friends via phone, instant messaging, through video chatting and more.

If you are in crisis, you can call [CMHA's crisis support line](#) at [705-745-6484](tel:705-745-6484).

"If people overreact and they self-isolate and they stop talking to people, that's not good for you," Langill says. "We're encouraging people to stay connected to family and friends."

Staying in contact with loved-ones is a part of self-care. Langill says taking care of yourself, meeting your basic needs including eating well are ways to reduce anxiety as well.

"Seek the same things that you normally seek: exercise, being outdoors, being active, being with friends in a safe way. It's really important not to be focusing all of our attention on COVID-19 all the time," he says. "Don't shut down."

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