

# PROVINCE RECOMMENDS WEARING MASKS IN PUBLIC

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The province is strongly recommending that families, or anyone interacting with young children, wear masks due to a sudden rise in hospitalizations among young people.

"We're calling on all families in all social settings, as we go into a very social time of the year, to please, please, please be careful around our most vulnerable," said Dr. Kieran Moore, the province's chief medical officer of health.

Dr. Moore said the province is also recommending that everyone

wear masks in public settings. It is not mandating the wearing of masks, noting that it is impossible to enforce in social settings. Instead, Dr. Moore said, he is hoping to educate those interacting with young children why it is important to wear masks.

The province is facing what he calls "a triple threat" of respiratory illnesses, including COVID, influenza and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), that is creating a strain on the pediatric sector of the health care system. It is the latter two that are having the biggest impact at the moment.

Dr. Moore said he is al-

so asking that children between the ages of two and five wear masks if they are able to and can put it on and take it off safely.

"It is the youngest children, those under five, that are especially vulnerable to severe outcomes from RSV, COVID and influenza. We need to take all the necessary steps to keep them safe when it comes to RSV," he said. "What could be a cold to you, could lead to a severe respiratory infection in a child four and under."

Dr. Moore said it will be up to individual school boards as to whether they decide to have students wear masks.

Dr. Moore said everyone should remember the practices that helped slow the spread of COVID-19.

- Screen daily for signs of illness and stay home when you are sick.
- Practice good hand hygiene and clean high-touch surfaces.
- Stay up to date with vaccines, including the flu shot.

Dr. Chris Simpson, executive vice-president, medical, at Ontario Health, said the province's hospitals are feeling the strain of an early onset of flu season, especially among children. As a result, he said, hospitals are redeploying resources to



Andrew Francis Wallace photo

Ontario's chief medical officer, Dr. Kieran Moore, issued a new appeal for mask wearing in indoor social settings, as well as indoor public spaces, at a news conference at Queen's Park.

make sure children coming to the hospital are treated in a timely fashion.

"In order to do this, other parts of the health system will be impacted," he

said. "We're already seeing a reduction in the number of scheduled surgeries and procedures and this will likely continue as we reallocate our resources to focus on pediatrics."



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