

NEWS FROM QUEEN'S PARK

12 June 2020

Ontarians can now establish Social Circles

Creating a close group of up to 10 people will help reduce social isolation.

People throughout Ontario are being encouraged to establish a social “circle” of no more than 10 people who can interact and come into close contact with one another without physical distancing. Dr. David Williams, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, updated public health advice to come into effect immediately province-wide to allow social circles of up to 10 members, including those outside the immediate household.

Social circles will support the mental health and well-being of Ontarians and help reduce social isolation.

Details on how to establish a social circle were provided today (12 June) by Premier Doug Ford; Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health; and Dr. Williams.

“At the outset of the pandemic, we had to make the necessary, but difficult decision to ban large public gatherings and strongly advise physical distancing with everyone except immediate household members” said Premier Ford. “As the public health trends improve and our collective efforts start to pay off, we’re now able to take another step forward today by allowing families and their loved ones to reunite and spend time with one another safely through social circles.”

The province has developed a practical step- by-step guide to help Ontarians as they safely develop and join a social circle.

“Ontarians should think of their circles as the people they can touch, hug and come into close contact as we continue our shared fight against COVID-19,” said Minister Elliott.

“While this is an exciting step forward, every Ontarian should follow the advice provided by our public health experts to ensure they do so safely and in a way that limits the spread of this virus, including and especially by only being part of one circle. We all owe it to each other to act responsibly.”

The rules for social circles are different from the expansion of social gatherings from five to 10 people. Social gatherings can be any 10 people from outside your household, but where physical distancing of at least two metres must be maintained. For example, the expansion of social gatherings enables individuals and families to enjoy the company of others at backyard barbeques and picnics in neighbourhood parks, while respecting physical distancing advice.

On the other hand, social circles will enable Ontarians to enjoy close contact with members of their circle. This could include hugging, carpooling, enjoying a patio and sharing a meal without

staying two metres apart. Ontarians should avoid close-contact activities with anyone outside of their circle if they are unable to maintain physical distancing. Social circles will also bring back supports from people outside of their household who can now help with children, seniors or those in need.

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“Not only will social circles help to improve people’s mental health and reduce social isolation, they will support rapid case and contact tracing by limiting the number of close contacts, in the event of a case of COVID-19 in that circle,” said Dr. Williams.

While physical distancing does not need to be practised between members of the same social circle, other public health advice, including frequent hand washing, should be maintained.

Anyone who is ill or feeling sick should immediately limit their contact with anyone in their circle, inform the other members of the circle, self-isolate, and seek testing if they have COVID-19 symptoms, by visiting one of the 145 assessment centres across Ontario. They should also seek testing if they are concerned that they might have been exposed to COVID-19 or be at risk.

Ontarians who wish to form a safe social circle should follow these five simple steps:

- 1.** Start with your current circle: the people you live with or who regularly come into your household;
- 2.** If your current circle is under 10 people, you can add members to your circle, including those from another household, family members or friends;
- 3.** Get agreement from everyone that they will join the circle;
- 4.** Keep your social circle safe. Maintain physical distancing with anyone outside of your circle; and
- 5.** Be true to your circle. No one should be part of more than one circle.