

Premier Ford optimistic about return to cottages for Victoria Day

As warmer weather brings more people into the great outdoors, enjoying nature, health officials say Ontarians can't return to their cottages just yet.

Canada's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Theresa Tam recently reiterated the importance of people staying at their primary residence and not visiting their cottages.

"This is particularly pertinent to us in Simcoe Muskoka because we are prime cottage country," Dr. Charles Gardner of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit noted.

"We are concerned that having a large influx of people from out of jurisdiction could increase transmission in our district, so we're asking the people not to go to their cottages at this time."

In addition to containing the virus, Dr. Gardner said there's also potential to strain the healthcare system if a large number of people access healthcare services that are in proximity to their cottage, as they are less equipped to deal with COVID-19.

"There's also potential for people not to get access to optimal care if they're in remote areas when they emerge as a case," Dr. Gardner said.

Contrary to health advice, Premier Doug Ford visited his Muskoka cottage on Sunday of Easter weekend to check on plumbing.

During a media briefing last Monday, he said there's only so long he can hold back taxpayers from cottages.

Premier Ford went as far as to say cottagers could enjoy Victoria Day weekend by the lake and will be consulting with mayors who put forward bans ahead of the statutory holiday.

"I think he's stating a fact as he sees it which is there's a strong desire for people to go and access their properties and he needs to make decisions based on many things," noted Dr. Gardner.

"The advice I give is based on health, I'm focusing on my mandate and my concern that there would be the potential for increased transmission," he added.

"At the end of the day I need to make my statements and provide my advice based on that."

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter