



Renfrew County and District Health Unit  
*"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"*

## For Immediate Release

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(Pembroke, Ontario, May 29, 2020)

### **RCDHU develops toolkit to support COVID-19 practices for community gardens**

On April 25, the Ontario government announced an amendment to its COVID-19 emergency orders, giving community gardens the green light to 'grow' ahead. It was recognized that the gardens provide an essential and lower cost source of fresh food for some individuals and families.

Local medical officers of health provide advice, recommendations and instructions that the community gardens must meet in order to operate. With support from other health units and using key points from the guidelines, Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) developed a toolkit for community gardens to help ensure safe practices at community gardens.

"The RCDHU community garden resources translate requirements from the Ontario Ministry of Health into practical tools and tips to support gardeners' continued enjoyment and connection with the foods that they eat, while keeping the garden safe and protecting their fellow gardeners from COVID-19," states Carolyn Froats-Emond, Registered Dietitian with Renfrew County and District Health Unit.

The COVID-19 Community Garden Toolkit <https://www.rcdhu.com/healthy-living/nutrition/> includes: a fact sheet with directives for both gardeners and garden coordinators; an action plan template for the opening of a community garden; a tracking tool requiring coordinators to maintain a current membership list for the garden; and, a self-screening tool to be used by everyone before entering a community garden. "Tracking membership helps RCDHU carry out contact tracing should someone become ill," says RCDHU's Acting Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Robert Cushman.

Ontario Ministry of Health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 must be followed, and in order to open, each community garden will need approval from their local public health unit.

Working in a community garden helps people to be physically active and have the satisfaction of learning important food skills – how to grow, harvest and enjoy a variety of vegetables and fruit," notes Froats-Emond. For many, time in the garden benefits their mental health, providing a place to relax and connect with nature.

Garden-specific, safety measures include physical distancing with only five people in the garden at once, no work bees or events, no sharing of tools and equipment, strict cleaning and disinfection, and no communal seating (i.e., picnic tables). As they would anywhere, gardeners should continue to practice the standard COVID-19 precautions – hand washing/hand rubbing, wearing a mask, coughing and sneezing etiquette – to help keep community gardens safe this summer.

For anyone wanting to start a community garden with a goal to help ensure food security for residents of Renfrew County, but are lacking funds, applications for grants are available through the County of Renfrew [www.countyofrenfrew.on.ca](http://www.countyofrenfrew.on.ca).

For more information visit RCDHU's website at <https://www.rcdhu.com/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-2/> or call RCDHU at 613-735-8651, ext. 516.

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