

Q. What is with the decision to keep the children out of school until September? Can you review the transmission of this virus to help me better understand why we can go to a patio shortly but not have our kids in school?

A. It is certainly confusing when we try to make sense of the decisions made by the higher ups in the political world. There are several reasons why the young ones need to get back into the classroom but perhaps the most important thing to consider might be the social aspect. Not only do the children learn the curriculum in the classroom, they are also learning social cues and more importantly, how to get along on the playground which eventually transcends to the world at large in adulthood. We also need to consider the super moms and dads who are helping their children with their on-line learning. Some of these parents might have a job to attend physically or perhaps their job is also on-line and they are having to share the home computer and share time with the students' schedule. Some of these parents voiced their concerns to us about such and how they struggle with being a parent, teacher/tutor, employee/employer, spouse and perhaps a caregiver to an ailing relative all in the same day. These were not complaints per se but rather people taking an opportunity to talk to us at the pharmacy and perhaps vent in a safe and supportive environment.

Moving on, our own kids are now Twenty Somethings and we see just how this pandemic has affected them as well. This is the time they should be living a care-free, stress-free lifestyle or just entering the beginning stages of responsibility. Yet, here they are, continuing their post-secondary and post-graduate studies online, meeting up with their buddies online to play computer games (we should have bought stocks in the online gaming industry!), and if they are lucky enough to land a

summer job, more than likely it is also online. With such a short time at home over their summer break, it does not seem fair for them to give up their social time with friends when nobody knows where they might be next summer and when or even if they might be able to connect with these people in person again. Some may have the same set of friends for their lifetime while others will gain new friends at different stages of their lives.

A few weeks back, a middle-aged customer phoned the pharmacy to request a refill and after struggling to just get the proper terminology of this simple task, she admitted that after being cooped up at home for so long, she has lost her innate ability to converse properly. Not that it totally matters, but this woman is a well-educated individual who would not normally struggle with phoning in a refill for her prescription as she has done regularly for many years.

There are many mature adults, also known as the elderly, that know they may not have many years left on this planet. They struggle with the idea of spending their last few years away from their family, close friends and other relatives. Some have defied the stay-at-home order and continue to gather for bridge dates, coffee/tea dates etc with close friends, hopefully all of whom have received their first dose of vaccine.

These above scenarios show that people of all ages and all stages of life are finding it difficult and what they want most of all is to be able to gather with friends and be social. Who can blame them? There are a few memes out there showing what it might look like post pandemic. Might we all be racing about like chickens with our heads cut off? Or perhaps we are all going to go around hugging each other? Might it be a return to the 70's hippie lifestyle as we all make room for one and all in our circle? Time will tell.

As we digress a little to display just how every age group in society is having a difficult time with the strict rules and measures that have been put upon us, it is important to realize that the government's goal is not to take away your rights and freedoms. The goal is to keep the majority of us citizens safe whilst trying to attain herd immunity through vaccinations. As we have stated several times in past columns, this is a novel coronavirus and we continue to learn more about this virus as days go by. Since this is a health column and not a political one, we will not delve too much into the countries that are run by right winged leaders. However, it is interesting to point out those countries that are struggling with this coronavirus. As of April 27, 2021, the number of Covid-19 deaths/100,000 population in Canada was 68.18. Compare that to the United States with 181.71 per 100,000. Worse yet, there is Brazil with 222.41/100,000 and tragically Peru with 568.87/100,000. Peru seemed to have done a great job initially with the virus but over the course of the pandemic that proved to be wrong. Peruvians struggled to change their ways and continued to shop daily for their food. This, for at least the 40% that are not fortunate to own a refrigerator, was a necessity but for the remainder, it was out of their need to remain social that they continued visiting the markets daily. Compound that with a shaky health system, a government that is not trusted and a nation made up mostly of poor people that either had to risk contracting the virus while at their job or go hungry. Understandably, many chose to work. Now, on to Brazil. Despite Bolsonaro's attempt to show Brazilians that there is no such virus, the data proves otherwise. One town in Brazil went against their leaders' suggestions and conducted an experiment. After vaccinating nearly all adults, they saw a 95% reduction in Covid-19 deaths proving the vaccines' effectiveness.

We want to get back to normal as much as the next person but it is important to get it right this time around. It may start to sound like a broken record but “opening up” too soon may allow for more variants which could put us into a 4th and/or 5th wave. There is a new variant (first seen in Vietnam) that is a mixture of the Kent and India variants which appears to be more transmissible (ie contagious) and is spread easily by air. This hybrid variant needs to be researched more before any conclusions can be made but the race is on to achieve herd immunity before the next deadly variant comes along. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was believed that the virus was transmissible via large droplets and thus the introduction of the 2 metre social distancing rule and the donning of face masks when that was unattainable. Now, WHO has recently declared that Covid-19 is in fact an airborne disease. This means that the virus can be spread through the air over a longer time period and over a further distance. This means that the 2 metre social distancing suggestion may not prove to be enough. The larger droplets will still fall to the ground within the 2 metres but the smaller, finer droplets that are associated with such an airborne virus will be suspended in the air for a much longer period of time. They can be mapped frequently at distances significantly greater than 2 metres from the infected individual. This obviously increases the risk when we are in an indoor setting, particularly in buildings that are equipped with poor ventilation systems. That unfortunately fits the description of many of the schools in our area and most of the rest of Ontario as well. It would be wise to take the opportunity of every school being emptied of students and update the ventilation systems before their return in September. The government did not seize the opportunity the last time the students were locked out of the schools for months. Perhaps they will consider it this time. Though it sounds as though the power at be are more concerned about getting people on the patios (for that soon

to be coming buck a beer no doubt...) than getting our kids back into class, there just might be some justification here if they make use of this time wisely. There are some very credible epidemiologists who feel that schools have been a largely overlooked source of infection. They feel that our testing mechanism is not able to track this effectively. While this theory is not shared by all, having our kids returning to school for even a few weeks does not come without some degree of risk and uncertainty. I am not saying they shouldn't be back in school, just that it's really complicated and both sides of the debate can make reasonable arguments in their favour.

Outdoor activities still continue to be seen as much safer since the small virus particles are not contained and therefore not limited to a small area. That is great news with summer approaching. It is important to include some outdoor social activities into your calendar once again. Be creative. If you are not comfortable to sit out on a local patio when the time comes that they are open, then perhaps you may choose to get together over a picnic at a park. Or maybe you will entertain people in your own backyard. The entertaining does not need to focus on the people of age to consume alcohol. As stated above, it is important for every age and stage of life to include some form of social activity. As we are hopefully nearing the end of this pandemic, remember to be kind to everyone. Try not to judge those who may have broken the rules. You do not know what they have or are going through. Mental health will likely be the main focus for many years to come as we deal with the ramifications that the pandemic has had on all of us. For more information on this or any other topic, contact the pharmacists at Gordon Pharmasave, Your Health and Wellness Destination.