



## **“Stay Active, Stay Safe”: CASEM Statement on Access to Physical Activity during COVID-19**

Access to physical activity and exercise should be a key recommendation in ensuring the health of Canadians during the evolving COVID-19 situation. Physical distancing, and ‘stay at home’ or ‘shelter in place’ orders, have been crucial interventions in the COVID-19 global pandemic. They have been vital in preventing exposure and thus limiting or halting the spread of the virus, fulfilling the term ‘flattening the curve’. There is evidence in Canada to suggest that this has been successful to date. However, physical distancing and physical activity and health need not be mutually exclusive.

1. Strong evidence exists for the pivotal role of regular, light to moderate intensity exercise in the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as Diabetes Mellitus, Cardiovascular Disease, Obesity, Osteoarthritis, Cancer and Dementia.

Restricting the population’s ability to access exercise opportunities during a prolonged and almost total ‘lockdown’ may ultimately result in an escalation of chronic disease and mental health issues in the foreseeable future, with a significant impact on already strained health care resources. Chronic diseases have not disappeared during this COVID-19 pandemic, and exercise is a vital tool for ongoing management.

Limiting physical activity may also result in a decline in cardiopulmonary health and reserve, particularly in those with pre-existing chronic disease, potentially leading to worse outcomes for those individuals if they contract COVID-19 or other illnesses.

2. Outdoor physical activity with exposure to nature has positive psychological effects.

The closure of all parks, public spaces, and recreation facilities may significantly impact an individuals' ability to perform healthy physical activity. It may not be feasible for some individuals to adequately maintain their physical fitness by switching from outdoor walking to exclusively indoor activities in a constrained living space, for example.

- 3 Moderate intensity exercise has a positive effect on the immune system, by elevating mood and reducing stress and anxiety. This is especially relevant today.

Exercise is recommended for those asymptomatic individuals without a history of COVID 19 disease, or for those who are at least ten days symptom free during recovery from COVID 19. Highly competitive or elite athletes are cautioned that very high intensity and sustained exercise may transiently lower immunity.

As we look to the road ahead in managing the evolving Coronavirus situation, we call on policy makers, public health officials, physicians, urban planners and others to consider policy, guidelines and infrastructure that will allow for and encourage healthy physical activity with an allowance for physical distancing.

Good guidance with maintenance and monitoring of outdoor and recreational facilities is needed to allow communities to return safely to physical activity and to the maintenance of health and wellness.

**Approved by the CASEM Board of Directors, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

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