

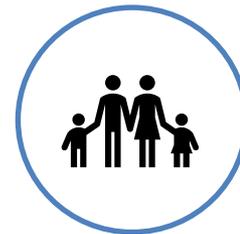
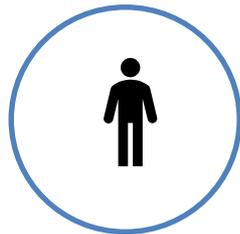
Technical Briefing

Safely Expanding Personal Networks: Establishing Social Circles

Ministry of Health
June 12, 2020

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has recommended that Ontarians should physically distance from anyone outside of their household, thereby creating a “protective ring” around the household/family.

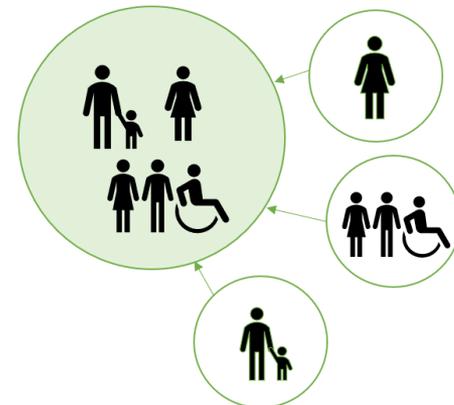
To date, this has been the public health advice.



Permitting additional close contact by expanding the household ring and creating a “social circle” will help to ease the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health measures on Ontarians while minimizing the risk of virus transmission.

Social circles should:

- Support mental health and well-being and reduce social isolation.
- Provide options for individuals and families that may need to receive additional support from people outside their household (e.g. with child care, elder care).
- Provide guidance on how to expand social contact while still reducing risk.
- Facilitate rapid contact tracing by limiting the number of close contacts, in the event of a case of COVID-19.



What are Social Circles?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health is updating public health advice to encourage Ontarians to establish a family or social “circle” of no more than 10 people who can interact and come into close contact with one another without physical distancing.

To form a safe social circle, Ontarians should follow these simple steps:

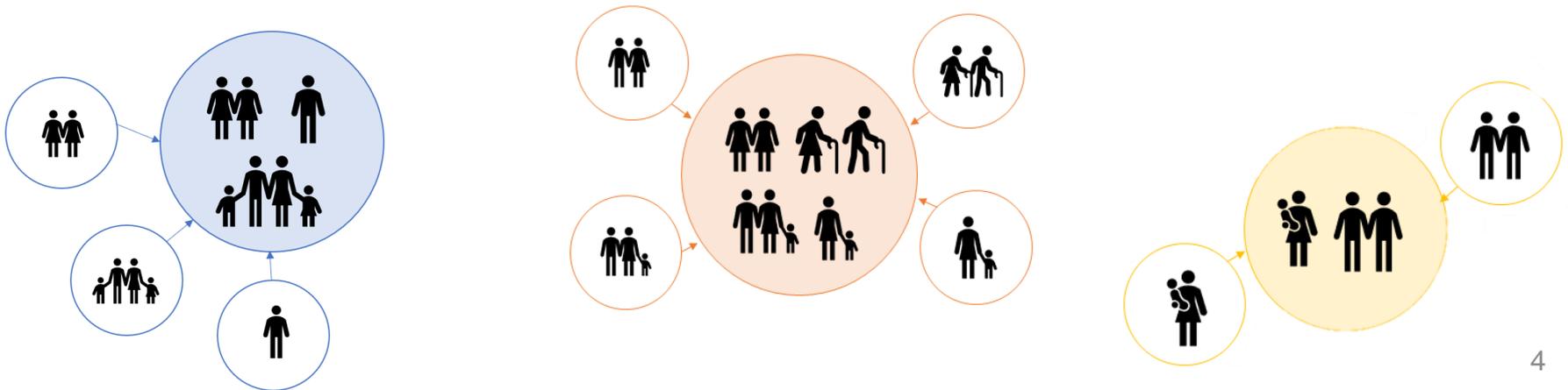
Step 1: Start with your current circle: the people you live with or who regularly come into your household.

Step 2: If your current circle is under 10 people, you can add members to your circle, including another household, family members or friends.

Step 3: Get agreement from everyone that they will join the circle.

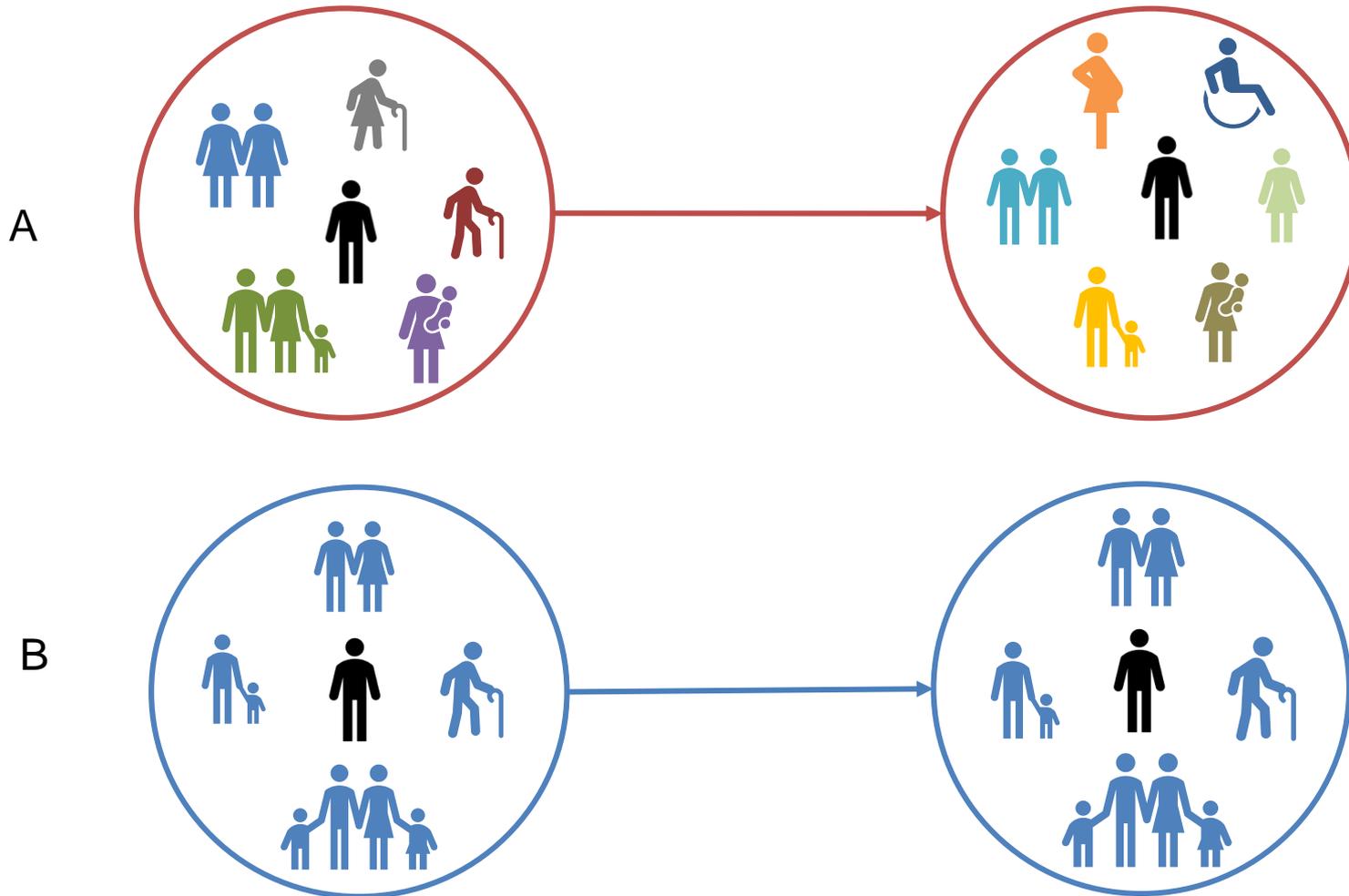
Step 4: Keep your social circle safe. Maintain physical distancing with anyone outside of your circle.

Step 5: Be true to your social circle. No one should be part of more than one circle.



How Do Social Circles Help Reduce COVID-19 Transmission? Ontario

Limiting close contact to your social circle reduces the number of opportunities for exposure to COVID-19.



Example



Mila lives on her own. Aside from work she has been staying at home, and has not visited friends or family.

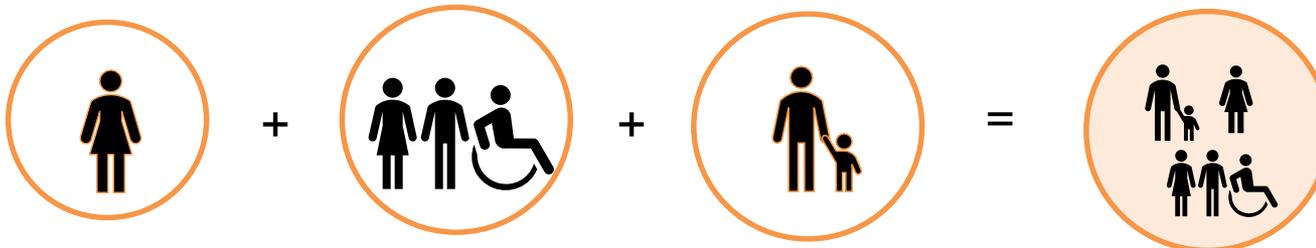
Mila's 75 year old father lives with her sister and brother-in-law. They have not seen Mila since the start of the outbreak as they have been physical distancing from anyone outside of their household as per public health advice.



Mila's brother and nephew live on their own. Like the rest of the family they have been self-isolating except for essential trips to the grocery store.

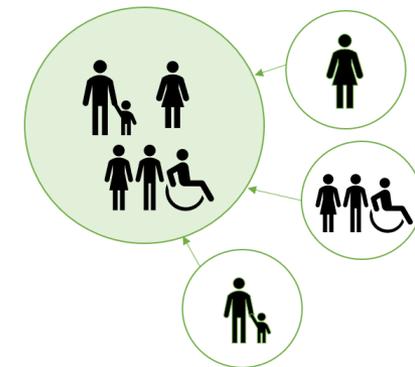
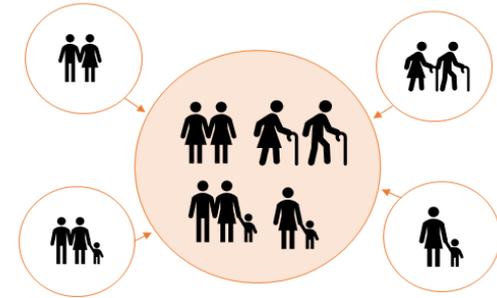
Mila and the rest of her family can now form a “social circle.”

This means they can see each other without physical distancing, and can touch, hug, etc. Mila may also help care for her father and family, if needed.



Additional Information

- Restricting close contact to the family or social circle will help keep the number of contacts low in the event a member of the “circle” becomes infected with COVID-19.
- At this time, large households may not be able to add additional people to their circle, as it would exceed ten people.
- Several other provinces are promoting a version of social circles.



Considerations When Forming a Social Circle

- Individuals at higher risk may wish to not participate in a family or social circle, limit the size of their circle, or limit the amount of interaction with their circle. This includes:
 - People at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 (e.g. people who work or volunteer in health care or other settings where close contact is not avoidable); and
 - People at higher risk of severe illness (e.g. individuals over 70, and those with compromised immune systems or underlying medical conditions).
- While physical distancing does not need to be practised between members of the same circle, other public health advice, including frequent hand washing, should be followed.
- Anyone who is feeling ill should immediately limit their contact with anyone in their circle and seek testing if they have COVID-19 symptoms by visiting one of the assessment centres across Ontario.

Questions

- Questions and Answers