



Office of the Commissioner
Community and Health Services Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Regional Chair Emmerson and Members of Regional Council

From: Katherine Chislett, Commissioner of Community and Health Services
Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health

Date: July 27, 2020

Re: Update on Public Health Emergency Response to COVID-19 Global Pandemic

This memorandum provides an update on the Public Health Human Resourcing Requirements for the Public Health COVID-19 Response report brought forward to Council in [June 2020](#), and also highlights collaborations with partners which support COVID-19 response efforts.

Effective August 1, 2020 391 individuals will be supporting the Public Health response to COVID-19

The current break down of the 391 individuals supporting the response includes:

- 314 Public Health staff redeployed from their regular programs and services (representing approximately 65% of Public Health staff)
- 40 new Public Health hires
- 33 staff redeployed from the rest of the corporation
- Four medical residents paid by medical residency programs continue to support the response efforts.

Since June 1, 2020, the Health Emergency Operations Centre has processed 92 requests for staff to return to home positions or new deployment assignments. Through this process, 57 staff have been returned to Public Health to support essential services programs (e.g., sexual health clinic back logs) and infection prevention and control measures as a result of COVID-19, 18 to Community and Health Services, seven to Corporate Services, four to Environmental Services and, one to Office of the CAO and five to Transportation Services. In addition, the Health Emergency Operations Centre has returned 11 staff to Legal and Court Services due to changes in the operational need for these staff for the COVID-19 response.

To support ongoing COVID-19 response efforts, and the increasing need for Public Health essential services, recruitment of additional staff is underway

In [June 2020](#), Council authorized Community and Health Services and the Medical Officer of Health to increase staffing by eight permanent staff and 172 temporary full time staff in 2020.

Recruitment efforts are underway for eight permanent full time Public Health staff, 55 temporary Public Health and five temporary support positions. Weekly interviews and onboarding of up to 10 staff per week commenced on July 6, 2020 and will continue through early September. Further, fall recruitment processes are in the discussion and planning phase. This fall planning, will include a reevaluation of the number temporary staff hires needed based upon any potential efficiencies gained from moving to a new electronic Provincial case and contact management data system which is anticipated to be implemented in York Region on July 31, 2020.

To address staffing pressures, Public Health continues to explore through the Ministry of Health and the Canadian Public Health Service the potential for low or no cost options to reduce additional staffing resources required where possible. Additionally, Public Health continues to refer a portion of York Region contacts to Public Health Ontario for their assistance with some contact follow-up calls. This support is provided at no cost.

COVID-19 response efforts continue during increased service demands associated with re-opening of communities

The additional staff hires described above will ensure Public Health's COVID-19 response can continue, while addressing increased service demands for Public Health COVID-19 essential services (e.g., infection prevention and control audits and high risk compliance inspections) and to continue non-COVID-19 essential Public Health programs (e.g., vaccine cold chain inspections). Other essential services restored include:

- Social work services for at risk families in the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program
- Virtual and in person sexual health clinic services, sexual and blood borne infection case and contact management, and substance use prevention and harm reduction programming
- Beach water sampling and West Nile Virus surveillance

Ongoing engagement with partners ensures efficient processes for reducing the spread of COVID-19

Public Health is working with other health units and community and provincial partners to effectively coordinate efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19. For example:

- Engaging with York Region school boards to plan for the safe reopening of schools in the fall (e.g. providing guidance on infection prevention and control measures)

- Continuing to coordinate with York Region’s three hospitals and Ontario Health on mobile testing and outbreak management support in various institutional settings (e.g. long-term care and retirement homes and congregate living facilities)
- Participating in discussions with the community tables established in York Region to help inform the response, and in provincial discussions on a comprehensive approach to address the inequities amplified by the COVID-19 experience (e.g. food insecurity, housing and income challenges)
- Working with business operators, neighbouring health units and provincial partners to both prevent and to quickly respond to COVID-19 infection in workplace settings
- Moving to a new electronic Provincial case and contact management data system which will increase efficiency, including minimizing manual laboratory data entry for public health units. The new case and contact management data system is expected to be implemented in York Region July 31, 2020.

On June 15th, 2020 the [Province](#) announced plans to begin collecting socio-economic data. Implementation is expected by early August, 2020. Once implemented, York Region residents who test positive for COVID-19 will be asked additional questions about their [race, income, languages spoken, and household size](#) as part of the case investigation process. Collecting this information will help York Region monitor and understand which communities are being impacted by COVID-19 and to respond to specific community needs through planning of targeted programs, services and supports.

York Region’s COVID-19 response continues to focus on protecting the public and future planning

A second wave of COVID-19 is anticipated this fall, and may coincide with the influenza and respiratory outbreak season. A second wave will require a flexible approach and infrastructure for shifting staff and resources back into emergency response efforts on short notice. During a second wave, the focus and actions will continue to be on protecting the public through effective and reliable public health measures including monitoring and surveillance, acting swiftly to contain and prevent further COVID-19 infections with contact tracing, case and outbreak management, infection prevention and control measures and reinforcement of preventive messaging.

Extensive mass immunization planning is underway in preparation to be able to respond promptly when a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available

At this point, the Medical Officer of Health anticipates public health units will be tasked with implementing the vaccine, once available. Planning is underway, and includes preparations to set up mass immunization clinics, client bookings, staff scheduling and communications. Public Health currently has memorandums of understanding with both York Region school boards and 17 school sites are identified as potential mass immunization clinic sites, and is exploring further memorandums of understanding should additional sites be required.

Public Health continues to support mandatory use of face coverings

In support of Council's [July 9, 2020](#) endorsement of Dr. Kurji's instruction regarding mandatory face coverings as an additional measure to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, Public Health has conducted further observational studies with outcomes to be shared verbally by the Medical Officer of Health during the July 30, 2020 Council meeting. The Region is collaborating with community partners to identify opportunities to distribute face coverings, information on their safe and appropriate use and other public health guidance to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Public Health will continue to monitor the use of face coverings to determine if additional or different messaging and/or supports are required.

In addition to continuing to monitor trends, communicating preventive measures and collaborating with partners, Public Health will continue with planning for the future and recruitment planning to support Public Health's COVID-19 emergency response and the increasing demand for essential services.

For more information on the memo, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health, at 1-877-646-9675 ext. 74012.

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