



Office of the Commissioner  
Community and Health Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

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

Date: June 9, 2020

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

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This memorandum provides an update on to the Public Health emergency response to COVID-19 global pandemic memorandum brought forward to Council on [April 30, 2020](#).

### **York Region Public Health Emergency Operation Centre remains activated in response to COVID-19 during the reopening of our Province**

While the Province has initiated a staged easing of restrictions, an active Public Health Emergency Operation Centre is required to maintain a response and to continue to protect the public. This response requires continued enhanced staffing (through placements, hiring and redeployment of staff) to ensure the safety of York Region residents and communities as the need continues to support work-places and congregate living settings to reduce transmission risk and protecting those most vulnerable.

### **Infection, prevention and control measures have become integral in managing the COVID-19 emergency response**

In addition to case and contact management, outbreak management, assessment centre testing and physical distancing measures, infection prevention and control measures have become an integral component to managing the response. These measures include on-site inspections, follow-up on inspection recommendations, on-site and/or virtual education, training and messaging for:

- Emergency child care centres

- External agencies such as the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Society of Canada, Children’s Aid Society and St. John’s Ambulance who is providing support to Long-Term Care Homes for moving residents
- Internal COVID-19 response groups such as COVID-19 runners (individuals whose role includes picking up testing swabs at Public Health Ontario and then distributing those swabs to different testing sites within the Region such as hospitals and Long-term care homes and distributing emergency personal protective equipment packs to facilities in the Region that are in COVID-19 outbreak)
- Long-term care homes, retirement homes, group homes, shelter, transitional housing and other congregate living settings
- Seasonal farming operations

### **Collaboration between York Region internal and external partners has become vital for outbreak prevention and management**

Collaborative partnerships have been established to support York Region’s COVID-19 response strategy in managing outbreaks and implementing infection prevention and control measures:

- **Outbreak Management:** Holds weekly meetings with the Central and Central West Local Health Integrated Networks to review long-term care home and retirement home outbreaks, organize pro-active testing schedules and infection prevention and control assessments. In addition, this group addresses the need for additional supports required for homes, support from local hospitals, staffing and personal protective equipment needs.
- **Pro-active Testing:** Coordinated pro-active testing by identifying the facilities and the numbers of staff and residents to be tested at each. Public Health collaborates with Paramedic Services and the three hospitals to conduct the testing, and communicates positive results to facilities
- **Health Protection:** Holds weekly meetings with Municipal bylaw officers and York Regional Police to support the safe opening of essential business and about the additional preventative measures needed to be implemented by operators. Notifications are provided to businesses/workplaces on health hazard prevention and regulatory requirements, and guidance is provided for reopening. In addition, Public Health, York Region Environmental Services and the Canadian Water Network have partnered on a research pilot for surveillance of the COVID-19 virus in wastewater

### **As the province begins to reopen, identifying new cases through testing is critical**

On May 24, 2020 the Ministry of Health issued additional direction for [testing](#). The current Provincial direction is to increase testing numbers across the province. York Region’s three assessment centres have capacity to increase daily testing numbers; however they are not currently seeing the volume they would anticipate. To help increase the number of people

getting tested, York Region is working with assessment centres to better understand the customer experience of accessing testing for COVID-19 in York Region. A customer journey mapping project is underway to identify where improvements can be made to make it easier for residents to obtain information, self-identify as needing COVID-19 testing, and to access testing.

Between April 24<sup>th</sup> and May 20<sup>th</sup>, the three Regional assessment centres combined conducted an average of 290 tests per day, with a daily maximum testing of 414 reached on April 29, 2020. Following May 24<sup>th</sup>, testing numbers increased to an average 650 tests per day.

### **Federal government serological testing plans currently underway will help us to better understand if people who have been infected by COVID-19 are immune to the virus**

On May 12, 2020, [Health Canada](#) authorized the first COVID-19 serological test, DiaSorin LIAISON®, for use in Canada. Canadian laboratories will use the test to detect antibodies specific to COVID-19.

Serological testing will contribute to a better understanding of whether people who have been infected by COVID-19 are immune to the virus. Further research will also help us fully understand the relationship between positive antibody tests and protection against re-infection. Under the leadership of Canada's COVID-19 Immunity Task Force, at least one million Canadian blood samples will be collected and tested over the next two years as the virus is tracked in the general population and in specific groups at greater risk of having been infected, including health care workers and the elderly.

As of May 30, 2020, 21 COVID-19 diagnostic testing devices have been authorized in Canada. A list of all authorized testing devices is posted on [Health Canada's website](#). This list includes nucleic acid-based tests, which are used to diagnose an active infection.

### **Effective collaboration has allowed York Region to conduct pro-active surveillance testing in Long Term Care and Retirement Homes**

The cumulative number of institutional outbreaks has largely been controlled, but some remain challenging, and new ones continue to emerge. As of June 9, 2020, there are 12 institutional outbreaks, and 53 have been resolved. Pro-active surveillance testing in Emergency Housing, Housing for Support Homes, Homes for Special Care and other congregate settings is currently underway. In addition, York Region continues to collaborate with local hospitals to complete infection prevention and control assessments, conduct education sessions and support facilities in accessing personal protective equipment and staffing supports.

### **The Province is providing business-owners, workers and families with information they need to reopen safely**

As anticipated, with the reopening of business, outbreaks of COVID-19 in workplaces have emerged. As of June 9, 2020 there were 23 opened confirmed outbreaks and 28 closed confirmed outbreaks among workplaces.

- 51 workplaces are located in York Region; 44 (86.3%) workplaces are located in Vaughan

Among these (51) confirmed outbreaks, there are 393 worker cases of which 84 (21.3%) workers are York Region residents, 295 (75.1%) workers are out of jurisdiction cases, and the remaining are unknown.

### **When investigating the origin or contacts of community spread situations of unknown origin of transmission arise**

In York Region, there are three types of situations where the origin of COVID-19 transmission is unknown:

- Unknown (1% of York Region cases): instances where public health is unable to contact an individual to complete an investigation (e.g. due to an individual relocating to self-isolate more effectively to protect others or Public Health not being able to reach an individual as the address and phone number information provided on the lab reports is not correct)
- Under investigation (3% of York Region cases): instances where an investigation is ongoing (e.g. newly reported cases or cases that are difficult to reach)
- Local Transmission (20% of York Region cases): instances where an individual has had no close contact with any known case of COVID-19, however they have successfully been contacted and had public health follow-up and a full investigation

Each contributes to York Region's reporting of percentages of new cases with an unknown source of infection which is shared publicly through the [york.ca](https://york.ca) COVID-19 dashboard [recovery measures](#) button.

### **The Ministry of Health has implemented new monitoring and reporting accountabilities for all public health units**

Public Health Ontario is tracking how quickly public health units are following-up on COVID-19 cases, by measuring the percentage of new cases contacted within one day of a case being reported and the percentage of contacts (individuals) who have been exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 case, who are reached with in one 24/48 hours. Collecting this data contributes to the overall provincial reporting of contact tracing indicators. Currently York Region is meeting or exceeding the indicators set out by the Province:

- For May June 4 to 6, 2020 York Region contacted 50 (100%) cases (individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19) of the total 50 newly reported cases within one day
- For the reporting period from May 26 to June 1, 2020 York Region's percentage of contacts attempted within one day was 100% each day. An attempted contact means calling an individual three times within two days. If an individual cannot be reached a

letter specifying public health is trying to get in touch with them about an important health matter is sent to the individual.

## **The exact timeline of when a COVID-19 vaccine might be available is still unknown**

Globally and in Canada, a range of animal and human/clinical trials are underway for potential COVID-19 vaccine candidates:

- In Canada, a candidate from a laboratory at the University of Saskatchewan is showing some promising results in animals and trials in human are to begin in the fall
- A vaccine developed in China will go through three phases of testing on volunteers at Dalhousie University. Data from China suggests the vaccine is safe for humans, however conducting additional trials in different countries will provide more evidence of safety and efficacy

Many uncertainties remain, such as how effective the vaccine will be, how long after a person is vaccinated will it offer protection, timeline for development, production and distribution.

Public health continues to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, including the school boards and some local municipalities, on sites for running mass immunization clinics, should the province decide public health will be responsible to provide and/or distribute a vaccine.

## **Reopening outcomes, timing of a vaccine, and the potential for a second wave will continue to impact York Regions ongoing response**

During the pandemic, Public Health has continued to keep our vulnerable populations safe through the provision of essential services (e.g., opioid surveillance, outbreaks and high risk diseases investigations, tuberculosis control and services for at risk families). Planning is under way to determine how to best continue the COVID-19 response, increase the number of essential services Public Health can provide, and address the increased service demands which will result from the reopening of our communities. To meet the needs of residents and regulatory requirements as re-openings continue, several public health functions will be required to resume and/or increase service levels such as:

- Sexual and blood borne infections: case and contact management
- High risk compliance inspections: work place openings such as restaurants
- Immediate health hazard response: responses to small water drinking systems
- Cold chain maintenance inspection program: COVID-19 vaccine preparations

Until a vaccine is available and is being administered to the public, Public Health will continue to need an enhanced COVID-19 response. Developing and implementing a strategy to ensure

Public Health has sufficient staff to continue the enhanced response, while providing essential services and addressing new demands that result from reopening's, is a current priority.

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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Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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