



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: January 11, 2021

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

This memorandum provides an update on the current Public Health COVID-19 response brought forward to Council on [December 3, 2020](#). As York Region enters 2021, Public Health remains focused on managing and preventing further spread and transmission of the virus during the second wave of the pandemic. Additional priorities include enforcing provincial legislation, collaborating with partners to support communities with higher rates of COVID-19 and immunization of York Region residents in long-term care homes, retirement homes and congregate living facilities. The emergency response is a corporate wide effort, and Public Health remains grateful to the Corporation and Regional Council for prioritizing the response and the critical supports provided.

Case and contact management, outbreak management, assessment centre testing and key public health measures implemented in 2020 remain a priority for managing the COVID-19 response in 2021

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, Public Health's focus and immediate actions have been and continue to be focused on protecting the public. The Public Health Emergency Operation Centre remains in full active response with enhanced staffing during the second wave of the pandemic. For 2021, in addition to preparing for mass immunization, Public Health's response will continue to focus on containing and reducing the transmission of the virus to ensure the safety of York Region residents and communities through case contact and outbreak management, testing, infection prevention and control measures, enhanced enforcement activities and providing communication and education, while continuing to provide essential core Public Health services such as the healthy babies health children, safe water and tuberculosis control programs and sexual health clinics.

On December 21, 2020 the Province announced a [provincewide shut down](#) to stop the spread of COVID-19

In consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario and other provincial health experts, the Province imposed a provincewide shutdown that came into effect on [Saturday December 26, 2020](#). For the shutdown period, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has advised that Ontarians should stay at home as much as possible and limit trips outside for only necessities such as food, medication, medical appointments or to support vulnerable community members. Employers in all industries have been asked to make every effort to allow employees to work from home. The shutdown includes additional measures such as:

- Limiting capacity for in-store shopping at discount and big box retailers selling groceries to 25%
- Requiring businesses to post capacity limit signs

The provincewide shutdown replaces the [Keeping Ontario Safe and Open Framework](#) for a period of 28 days in southern Ontario and during this time the added measures will be assessed to determine if it is safe to lift any restrictions or if they need to be extended.

On December 26, 2020 York Region moved from lockdown (maximum measures) – grey zone into the provincewide shutdown

York Region, after entering lockdown (maximum measures) – grey zone on December 14, 2020, became part of the provincewide shutdown on [December 26, 2020](#) and will remain in this zone until at least January 23, 2021. Staff anticipate details on how the Province will assess the data status of public health units to determine what zone to move them into closer to end of the 28-day shutdown period. Table 1 outlines York Region’s data levels for weekly incidence rate, positivity rate, reproductive number (Rt), active outbreaks and hospital admissions as of January 11, 2021.

Table 1
York Region Data Levels as of January 11, 2021

Data Levels	York Region Status
~Average weekly incidence per 100,000	200
~~*% positivity	9.71
~~**Rt	1.10
***Institutional outbreaks	49
***Workplace outbreaks	33

Data Levels	York Region Status
***School outbreaks	1
***Childcare centre outbreaks	3
~New non-ICU hospital admissions	28
~New ICU hospital admissions	2

Data notes:

- ~For the week of January 3, 2021 to January 9, 2021
- ~~For the week of January 4, 2021 to January 10, 2021
- *% positivity is the proportion of total tests conducted that were tested as positive (the number of positive tests among all tests completed). This helps us to understand the transmission within our community
- **Rt is the average number of subsequent cases resulting from one confirmed case. This helps us to understand the transmission within our community
- ***Total active outbreaks as of January 10, 2021

York Region has experienced growth in COVID-19 cases from September 1, 2020 through January 9, 2021

York Region gained 2,563 new COVID-19 cases the week of January 3, 2021 to January 9, 2021. The rate of case growth increased steadily from mid-November to mid-December when the Region was under the red level of control (stringent measures) of the Provincial framework and from mid-to late-December when the Region was under the grey level of control (lockdown/maximum measures). Attachment 1 outlines York Region's weekly COVID-19 case incidence rates and a comparison of rates with neighbouring jurisdictions between September 1, 2020 and January 9, 2021.

Since September 2020, there has been a steady increase in institutional COVID-19 outbreaks. Some settings have had second or third outbreaks including 20 long-term care homes, 25 congregate settings (group homes and emergency housing), 18 workplaces and 27 schools. Additionally, the number of new hospital admissions among COVID-19 cases has increased with 134 cases admitted to the hospital and 22 cases admitted to an ICU as of January 10, 2021.

Community settings continue to be a source of spread for the virus and a growing number of cases are acquired from unknown community locations and exposures

Community transmission continues to drive the growth of cases in York Region. Close contact with a case remains the most common acquisition source among York Region residents, followed by local transmission within the community when the source of the case is unknown. Since September 2020, about 45% of cases acquired COVID-19 through close contact with another case. For example, while providing care for a positive case, living with a positive case or having similar prolonged close contact with a positive case when they were ill. Another 23% acquired the infection through local transmission.

Since September, private holiday gatherings have contributed to the case growth in York Region. For example, private gatherings held over Thanksgiving 2020 and in November, resulted in over 50 COVID-19 cases. This number is expected to rise if gatherings occurred during the recent holiday season.

York Region's COVID-19 enforcement task force increased inspection activity during the level of control – red, and throughout the level of lockdown – grey

Task force members include representatives of Bylaw officers from all nine municipalities in the Region, York Region Public Health Inspectors, York Regional Police, and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario. Officers from the task force in partnership with the [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) conducted a community safety campaign across York Region businesses initiated on November 27, 2020 (Black Friday) and throughout that weekend. The inspections focused on malls, big box and retail stores, restaurants, food premises, fitness centres and various other locations to ensure COVID-19 measures were being met.

During the holiday season and the province wide shutdown York Region has continued to enforce COVID-19 related Regulations under the *Reopening Ontario Act*

It continues to be a priority to enforce the requirements set out under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). The taskforce continues to respond to complaints in its respective municipality or jurisdiction and to do proactive monitoring and enforcement over the weekends. During the holiday season between December 21, 2020 to January 3, 2021 the following number of enforcement activities occurred:

- Inspections: 1,886
- Education: 392
- Charges: 26

During the holiday period, specifically Boxing Day and New Years Eve, staff were deployed to ensure the Provincial measures were adhered to. Additional activities included:

- Using the emergency notification system to contact:
 - All York Region businesses and workplaces advising them of the new restrictions under [Ontario Regulation 82/20](#)
 - All York Region banquet halls to remind them of the restrictions in preparation for New Years Eve
- Proactively calling all York Region banquet facilities to ensure they were aware of the restrictions in [Ontario Regulation 82/20](#) and to advise York Region Public Health Inspectors would be monitoring New Years Eve activities

Overall, between March 18, 2020 and January 6, 2021 combined efforts of [enforcing COVID-19 regulations](#) by York Regions COVID-19 enforcement task force members and York Region Transit has resulted in 30,070 inspections, 16,754 education activities and 722 charges.

York Region is working with Provincial and external partners to support communities with higher rates of COVID-19

York Region is participating in a Ministry of Health pilot to address high rates of COVID-19 in [high priority communities](#) facing barriers related to the social determinants of health across Ontario, including in York Region. In collaboration with the [Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services](#), [Ontario Health](#), [Health Commons Solutions Lab](#), the [Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing](#), the [Ministry of the Solicitor General](#) and [ICES research institute](#), the pilot is focusing on three key areas:

- Increasing access to testing, particularly in communities demonstrating high positivity rates and lower testing rates
- Community outreach and education with increased awareness and education about and how to reduce transmission of COVID-19
- Offering wraparound supports and working to remove barriers to COVID-19 prevention, such as offering supports when needed to facilitate self-isolation

Communities have been identified through COVID-19 case and testing data and social determinants of health data from the [Ontario Marginalized Index \(2016\)](#). York Region is currently working with the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health to finalize participating communities and to identify local agencies to roll out the project. Public Health anticipates being able to report on the outcomes of the pilot in the Spring of 2021.

In December 2020, York Region participated in the voluntary asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for school staff, students and families of students

On [November 26, 2020](#) the Ministry of Education announced a four-week pilot project to conduct school-based asymptomatic COVID-19 testing in four priority areas: City of Toronto, Region of Peel, City of Ottawa and York Region. York Region Public Health worked closely with the Ministry of Education, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario Laboratory and York Region's two publicly funded school boards to implement this initiative.

Over 3,000 staff, students and families of students were tested as part of this provincial initiative

Between December 3, 2020 and December 17, 2020, in York Region 22 elementary schools and eight secondary schools were selected for testing. In total, 3,224 staff, students and families were tested. As of January 7, 2021, York Region Public Health has received 3,224 results; 3,193 were negative, 14 were indeterminate (individuals with an indeterminate result are followed by public health and sent for retesting as needed), and only 17 results were positive

(0.5% positivity). Of these positive cases, only four occurred in a school setting, resulting in a cohort of staff or students being dismissed to self-isolate at home for 14 days after last exposure. The remaining 14 cases occurred among family members or in students attending virtual school. School specific summary documents are being prepared and will show the results by type of individual tested per school and will be posted to york.ca/safeatschool once completed.

The Provincial government is actively rolling out plans for vaccine distribution

Health Canada approved for use in Canada the Pfizer vaccine on [December 9, 2020](#) and the Moderna vaccine on [December 23, 2020](#). Ontario has started the roll out of its [three-phase vaccine distribution plan](#):

1. Phase One: Began on December 15, 2020. In Phase One, the vaccine is being administered to health care workers in hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes, congregate care settings for seniors and remote Indigenous communities
2. Phase Two: Will begin this winter when more doses of vaccine become available in Ontario. In Phase Two, vaccine will be made available to all health care workers, residents in long-term care home and retirement home, home care patients with chronic conditions and additional Indigenous communities
3. Phase Three: Will begin when vaccines are widely available for everyone who wishes to be immunized, though vaccines will not be mandated. The Ontario government will provide people who complete their COVID-19 vaccination with a proof of vaccination in the event it is needed for travel, attending events or entering businesses

Following the release of the three-phase vaccine distribution plan the Province announced on [January 5, 2021](#) all residents and workers of long-term care homes in the priority regions of the City of Toronto, Region of Peel, York Region and Windsor-Essex would receive their first COVID-19 vaccination by January 21, 2020 and provided a [COVID-19 vaccination update](#).

Vaccine roll out in York Region is taking place through Mackenzie Health and Southlake Regional Health Centre

The Pfizer vaccine

The Pfizer vaccine was received in York Region on December 21, 2020 and is being rolled out through Mackenzie Health and Southlake Regional Health Centre. These two hospitals were among 21 provincial hospital sites to receive and administer the vaccine to long-term care home staff and health care workers based on the Province's [Ethical Framework](#) for COVID-19 vaccine distribution. Hospital sites were chosen in the initial part of phase one due to their existing capacity to store the Pfizer vaccine at the vaccine's required ultralow freezing temperature of -80°C. Additionally, the Pfizer vaccine could not initially be transported from the storage location at the hospitals, therefore long-term care staff have been traveling to the hospital vaccine clinic sites. York Region Public Health's role with the Pfizer vaccine has been

to assist with the prioritization of long-term care homes for staff attending vaccine clinics and with staffing in specific situations when required.

The Moderna vaccine

York Region received the Moderna vaccine on December 30, 2020. The vaccine was received by Southlake hospital, and is being distributed by Public Health and administered initially to residents of long-term care homes and following this to retirement homes and congregate living settings. York Region has 28 long-term care homes and as of January 10, 2021 all 28 homes had received delivery of the vaccine.

This vaccine requires a less extreme storage temperature at -20°C; however, it does need cold chain management beyond the current vaccines stored and distributed by Public Health. Initially, the vaccine was received by York Region Public Health and stored at Southlake Regional Health Centre. Recently, Public Health received one freezer from the Ministry of Health to store the vaccine and the vaccine has been transferred to York Region Public Health. York Region is purchasing five additional freezers that have been built for the specific purpose of storing the vaccine at correct temperatures and one refrigeration unit. These freezers which are due to arrive in February 2020 will ensure Public Health has the capacity to accept and store the volume of vaccine needed for mass immunization roll out in York Region.

The Moderna vaccine may be stored and moved in frozen format at freezer temperatures. Once thawed it may be stored up to 30 days at regular refrigerator temperatures. These storage requirements allow for the vaccine to be transported so that immunization of staff and residents can take place directly in long-term care homes and congregate settings. Following the vaccine administration of these first two groups, First Nation communities and those with chronic diseases receiving home care will begin to receive the vaccine as part of the Province's phased approach.

York Region Public Health continues to actively prepare for a large-scale mass immunization campaign

In addition to York Region preparing to store and distribute the vaccine through Public Health's [vaccination program and state-of-the-art vaccine depot](#), Public Health is engaging in discussions with internal and external partners to determine appropriate mass immunization clinic site locations, including drive-through clinics. Public Health in collaboration with York Region Transit are also exploring opportunities to use busses, which are not currently in use to function as mobile clinic sites.

This ongoing work is taking place through York Regions' Mass Immunization Advisory which is made up of seven working groups comprising of staff from across the Region whose collective efforts are aimed at being prepared to immunize York Region's 1.2 million residents.

Staffing recruitment for the COVID-19 response efforts continues with forward planning for mass immunization

Public Health continues to assess and align staffing needs to ensure case and contact management, outbreak management and infection prevention and control measures continue to meet the changing demands of the ongoing response. Current recruitment efforts include forward planning for mass immunization. Additional temporary staff who will initially support case and contact management include 30 temporary part-time final year nursing, pharmacy, medical, paramedic and public health inspection students and 30 temporary full-time registered nurses. Given increasing demands for additional work force across public health settings, recruitment is underway for these additional staff as Public Health continues to manage the COVID-19 response and prepare for mass immunization.

It will cost approximately \$4.2 million annually, including salary and benefit costs, technology related costs, and mobile devices for the additional temporary positions identified above. It is anticipated that the Province will reimburse York Region for these costs as they are extra ordinary costs to support the COVID-19 Response in York Region. The proposed 2021 budget includes \$11.4 million for costs associated with a COVID-19 Mass Immunization program and the cost of these temporary positions will be managed within this estimated budget.

Combined with public health measures the COVID-19 vaccine will be an important tool to help stop the spread of the virus as the population becomes immunized

As the pandemic continues, Public Health's focus and actions remain on managing and preventing further spread and transmission of the virus while planning for mass immunization. Until the population has been vaccinated, Public Health will continue to be required to maintain an enhanced response with case and contact management, outbreak management, infection prevention control measures, transparent reporting and on-going communications.

Being vaccinated will allow individuals, families and workplaces to gradually and safely return to normal life. The COVID-19 vaccination will work with an individual's immune system to help keep them from getting COVID-19, be a safe way to help build protection, lower how much of the virus can spread in the population, which will help build herd immunity and stop the pandemic and will be a personal health choice.

However, until the vaccine is widely available, [regional health measures](#) for York Region will need to be followed and it will be important for residents to continue to take [actions to help stop the spread](#) of the virus, monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 and [seek assessment and testing](#) if necessary.

For more information on the memo, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 74012.

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Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Attachment (1)
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