



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: May 10, 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 in [April, 2021](#). 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.

During the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health remains focused on reducing and preventing further spread of the virus

Public Health remains steadfast in its response to the recent increase case numbers through case and contact management, outbreak management, infection control measures, enforcing provincial legislation and collaborating with partners to support communities with higher rates of COVID-19. Additionally, in collaboration with hospital and community partners York Region's [COVID-19 Vaccination Program](#) continues to be adjusted based upon the supply of vaccine received. Adjustments ensure continued vaccination opportunities for York Region residents through the guidance of the Province's [COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan](#).

April 7, 2021, the Province declared a third Provincial emergency moving York Region into a Provincial Stay-at-Home Order on April 8, 2021

The Region entered the Province-wide shut down on April 3, 2021 and effective April 8, 2021 a provincewide [emergency and stay-at-home order](#) was in place requiring everyone to remain at home except for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services (including getting vaccinated), for outdoor exercise, or for work that cannot

be done remotely. This was followed by the Province's [decision](#) to move elementary and secondary schools to remote learning after the April 2021 break.

On April 17, 2021, the Province strengthened the enforcement of the [stay-at-home order](#) targeted at stopping the rapid growth of COVID-19 case rates and address the increasing pressures being placed on the province's health care system as a result of the rise in cases.

York Region experienced a peak in COVID-19 cases in mid-April

From early January 2021 to early March 2021 while the Region was under a stay-at-home order and later returned to the Red-Control level of the provincial framework, the average number of new cases reported daily steadily declined.

Beginning early March 2021, the COVID-19 incidence in York Region increased to a high of 292.6 per 100,000 the week of April 11, 2021 to April 17, 2021. Over 76% of cases had a variant of concern (VOC) or mutation of interest (MOI) identified. Public Health has been actively monitoring the indicators since strengthened public health measures were put in place and has observed some declines in the most recent week ending April 25, 2021.

Table 1 outlines York Region's data levels for average number of new COVID-19 cases per day, weekly incidence rate, positivity rate, reproductive number (Rt) and active outbreaks and as of May 7, 2021. Attachment 1 outlines York Region's data levels for these indicators as well as the data thresholds for each level of control of the Provincial framework.

Table 1
York Region Data Levels as of May 7, 2021

Indicators	York Region Status
* Average new COVID-19 cases per day	298.7
**Weekly incidence rate per 100,000 residents	174.2
***Per cent (%) positivity	9.4
****Reproductive number (Rt) Reference Strain	0.90
*****Reproductive number (Rt) MOI and VOC	0.98
Active outbreaks	60
Institutional outbreaks	16
Workplace outbreaks	25
School outbreaks	2
Childcare centre outbreaks	17
Day program outbreaks	0

Data notes

- *Daily Average May 1 to May 7, 2021
- ** Incidence May 1 to May 7, 2021

- *** For May 1 to May 7, 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 reference strain, April 13 based on Estimated date of Infection
- *****Rt for MOI and VOC, April 16 based on Estimated date of Infection for Mutations of Interest (MOI) and Variants of Concern (VOC)

York Region experienced 2,091 new COVID-19 cases the week of May 1, 2021 to May 7, 2021. York Region's weekly case incidence is currently below that for Toronto, Peel and Durham health units. Attachment 2 outlines York Region's weekly COVID-19 case incidence rates and a comparison of rates with neighbouring jurisdictions between September 1, 2020 and May 6, 2021.

York Region continues to experience changing patterns of COVID-19 outbreaks through the course of the pandemic

After a period of decline in institutional outbreaks between February 2021 and March 2021, there have been fluctuations in institutional COVID-19 outbreaks in York Region due mostly to transmission among staff members and a consistent decrease in new infections, associated hospitalizations and deaths have been observed in residents. Vaccination in long-term care and retirement homes has reduced morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 in resident populations.

Variants of concern are having a substantial impact in York Region. There has been an increase in variant of concern related outbreaks since early March 2021. While it is early to know the impact of vaccinations in institutional setting on the new variants, it is known that new variants of concern spread more easily and early require continued infection prevention and control support from Public Health.

In the week leading up to the April 2021 school spring break, school outbreaks and student and staff case counts saw a rapid rise with some of the highest numbers since schools re-opened in September 2020. This trend has now reversed since schools moved to remote learning and contrasts with increasing outbreaks in workplace and childcare settings. Some workplace settings are more prone than others to severe or repeat outbreaks; these include product/materials manufacturing, food manufacturing, service industry and construction. Childcare centres have also seen a recent slow but steady increase in outbreaks and case counts. Public Health Infection Prevention and Control specialists continue to support childcare centres with proper public health measures including screening practices, cohorting, hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting.

There are several factors that may impact why these settings experience fluctuations in outbreaks, for example:

- New variants of concern spread more easily than the original COVID-19 strain
- Ongoing community and household transmission of COVID-19 which impacts the probability of the virus entering a setting where outbreaks can occur
- Slower vaccine uptake in agency staff in long-term care homes

- Varying levels of compliance with public health measures, guidance and policies in the community or workplace setting

Community transmission continues to drive growth of cases in York Region

Community settings continue to be a source of spread for the COVID-19 virus. Close contact with a known case remains the most common acquisition source among infected York Region residents, followed by local transmission within the community where the source of the case acquisition is unknown. Since September 2020, about 47% of York Region 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 35% of cases acquired the infection through local transmission from an unknown community source.

Majority of cases in York Region have a mutation of interest or are a [variant of concern](#)

As of May 7, 2021, 14,467 cases in York Region met the definition of a variant of concern or mutation of interest, of which 656 were confirmed as the UK (B.1.1.7) variant, 126 were confirmed as the Brazilian (P.1) variant, 18 were confirmed as the South African (B.1.351) variant and 2 were confirmed as the variant from India (B.1.617). The lineage of the remaining is either yet to be determined or will not be sequenced or assumed to be UK variant due to sequencing changes at the laboratory. Most of York Region's variant of concern and mutation of interest cases are linked to household transmission. The proportion of COVID-19 cases that have a mutation of interest or a variant of concern continues to increase.

York Region has been proactive prior and during COVID-19's third wave in working with community partners, long-term care and retirement homes and congregate care settings to lessen the spread of the virus

Public Health continues to collaborate with Paramedic and Seniors Services, Social Services, York Region hospitals and provincial partners (Ontario Health, Home and Care Community Support Services (previously known as the LHINs)) to coordinate and support outbreak prevention and management, as well as, supporting on going vaccination efforts in long-term care home, retirement homes and congregate care settings.

Leading up and into the wave 3 of the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health has been active in working with community partners to implement actions and activities aimed at lessening the spread of COVID-19 in these facilities, such as:

- Providing new tools and resources to support outbreak management
- Hosting COVID-19 outbreak preparedness webinars that covered the topics of outbreak preparedness, infection prevention and control measures, planning and management
- Preparing and distributing an outbreak preparedness and resource package that includes topics such as COVID-19 and vaccine related resources, York Region Public

Health contact information for long-term care and retirement homes and congregate settings

- Creating and sharing tip sheets (e.g. COVID-19 vaccine and How to Complete a Lab requisition)
- Working to provide input into provincial guidance and adjust internal policies to balance the risk of COVID-19 with new variants and rising case counts versus high resident vaccine rates

On [April 9, 2021](#) the Province announced Home and Community Care Support Services partners would be redeployed to support hospitals. Public Health continues to assess and work with partners to assess the impact of supports offered with our congregate care settings, including additional infection, prevention and control support, mobile testing efforts, weekly coordination with home and care community support services staff and agency staffing supports to ensure supports are maintained.

Ongoing assessment of local data helps Public Health prioritize new COVID-19 cases

In the fall of 2020, Public Health developed and applied a tiered approach to case investigations responding to the surge of cases during wave 2 of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public Health's model effectively triaged cases, permitting case management staff to focus and prioritize efforts on cases posing the highest risk of causing further transmission. The prioritized approach contributed to reductions in overall case counts through timely identification and isolation of high-risk close contacts. Now, in wave 3, Public Health has further refined York Region's local surge model, reflective of the York Region epidemiological data and evolving situation. Based on a comprehensive review of the wave 2 and early wave 3 local data, Public Health's new surge model prioritizes cases on an eight-step model. In addition to these priorities, Public Health has adopted the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations of investigating most recently reported cases first, as opposed to those in the backlog, ensuring those at greatest risk for transmission forward are investigated and isolated as quickly as possible.

By implementing this evidence-based local approach to York Region's recent surge in cases, Public Health's case management team is able to investigate nearly four of the highest risk cases per day per investigator (between 250 and 300 cases per day) resulting in only the cases posing the lowest risk of causing ongoing transmission to receive less intensive case follow-up (e.g., letter with instructions).

York Region's COVID-19 enforcement task force continues to prioritize enforcement requirements set out under the *Reopening Ontario Act*

York Region's enforcement task force continues to conduct safety campaigns, respond to complaints, conduct proactive monitoring, and provide education. Between March 19, 2021 and April 18, 2021 York Region's task force in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Training and

Skills Development completed community safety campaigns focusing food premises, supermarkets and grocery stores, big box retail stores, and pharmacies (Table 2).

Table 2
York Region Safety Campaigns

Date	Type of Inspection	Outcome of Inspection
March 19, 2021	Joint Inspection with Municipal Bylaw of food premises	9 inspections, 3 charges issued
March 31, 2021	Follow-up visit due to COVID-19 activity in a food premise	1 charge issued
April 10, 2021	Joint inspections with municipal bylaw at supermarkets and big box retail stores	54 inspections, no charges issued
April 16 to 17, 2021	Joint inspections with municipal bylaw at smaller grocery stores, pharmacies, and food premises	88 inspections, 1 charge issued

York Region Public Health is also focusing on joint workplace inspections with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development at large manufacturing and processing plants and factories with confirmed COVID-19 activity. Between March 19, 2021 and April 18, 2021, there were 38 confirmed workplace cluster inspections conducted. As a result of these inspections two *Reopening Ontario Act* charges were issued to workplaces for lack of masks worn by employees, and for lack of cleaning and disinfection.

Overall, between March 18, 2020 and May 10, 2021 combined efforts of [enforcing COVID-19 regulations](#) by York Regions COVID-19 enforcement task force members and York Region Transit has resulted in 60,956 inspections, 27,680 education activities and 1,274 charges.

York Region continues to use Section 22 Class Orders and Letters of Instruction to assist with reducing the spread of COVID-19

York Region's two Section 22 Class Orders and letter of instruction issued to York Region residents and businesses have provided Public Health with additional tools to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in York Region

1. [Section 22 Class Order](#) under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act* whereby all residents of York Region must cooperate in assisting case and contact management. This order has been an effective tool with challenging COVID -19 positive cases and/or contacts and has been instrumental in gathering required information and gaining compliance:
 - During the case and contact investigation process, Public Health investigators advise the cases/contacts of the order as part of their introductory statements. This helps reinforce the importance of providing the requested information

- In some circumstances, individuals are not forthcoming with information, become angry or hostile and may even discontinue the conversation. In these situations, public health refers the case for a home visit from a Public Health investigator. The purpose of the home visit is to confirm missing information and reaffirm Public Health instructions, which may include self-isolation requirements
 - In most situations where investigations have escalated, the case/contact provides the relevant information being requested and no charges are issued. However, with recent increases in abusive behaviour towards staff Public Health is experiencing an increase in the frequency to refer cases to home visit
 - To date, 28 follow-up investigations to private residences have been complete and three charges laid to individuals for non-compliance with the section 22 order
2. [Section 22 Class Order](#) under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act* where owners and operators of businesses permitted to open under the *Reopening Ontario Act* to prohibit persons at the establishment from using a Hookah. Since the issue of this order Public Health and Municipal Bylaw Inspectors have inspected 20 hookah lounges and issued 3 charges.
 3. [Letter of Instruction](#) for York Region workplaces with respect to immediately implementing any measures as required by Public Health as a result of a COVID-19 positive case in a workplace, including measures for outbreak management, and supporting vaccination of workplace staff, as requested by Public Health

The Province continues to implement strategies to maximize vaccine distribution and administration across jurisdictions

To further support the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines the Province has implemented additional strategies to maximize the numbers of individuals vaccinated by expanding the availability of COVID-19 vaccines:

- May 5, 2021, as vaccine deliveries from the federal government increase expanding the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan with a launch of [mobile vaccine units](#) for small to medium-sized businesses in hot spot communities at select businesses that have employees who cannot work from home and have a history or risk of outbreaks
- May 3 and May 6, 2021 expanding vaccination bookings through the Provincial booking system [to more people](#) (including individuals aged 18 and over in hotspot locations, individuals turning 50 and over, individuals with high-risk health conditions and those who cannot work from home who fall under [group one](#) of the Provincial vaccination plan and First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals in addition to the other channels previously available to book their appointment)
- April 29, 2021, preparing for increased vaccine allocations to hot spot communities as vaccine supply increases in [May 2021](#) and releasing an accelerated [Phase Two schedule](#) for Provincial COVID-19 vaccine booking eligibility

- April 20, 2021, increasing access to support at-risk communities through select pharmacies offering [24/7 AstraZeneca vaccinations](#)
- April 18, 2021, lowering the age of eligibility for AstraZeneca vaccine to 40
- April 11, 2021, expanding vaccination locations to over [700 additional pharmacies](#) to offer the AstraZeneca vaccine

Ontario's Ministry of Health has provided [Guidance for Prioritization of Phase 2 Populations for COVID-19 Vaccinations](#), including adults living in COVID-19 hot spot communities

Hot spot, or high priority communities, are a priority group in [Phase 2 of the provincial vaccine plan](#). These communities are defined as geographical locations with historic and ongoing high rates of death, hospitalization and COVID-19 transmission. On April 13, 2021 to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and to protect communities with higher rates of transmission, the Province announced Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination strategy would target 114 high priority communities across the province. Thirteen of these communities identified by the Province are in York Region.

Given limited vaccine supply, York Region identified the five highest priority communities, with four in the City of Vaughan and one in the City of Markham, in the following postal codes L4L, L6A, L4K, L4J, and L3S. These five initial communities were identified in alignment with the provincial guidance, plus using York Region data to consider factors such as prevalence of variant cases, COVID-19 incidence rates, hospitalizations, deaths and an internal equity framework based on the Ontario Marginalization Index. Recently, York Region has expanded to all remaining provincially identified high priority communities in the Cities of Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill (L0J, L3T, L4C, L4E, L4H, L6B, L6C and L6E). Additionally, York Region expanded high priority communities to two locally identified in the City of Richmond Hill (L4C) and Town of East Gwillimbury (L9N). Public Health will take the same approach with local data to identify additional priority communities from the Provincially identified hot spot communities and other communities in York Region.

Expanding York Region's vaccine program into these high priority communities aims to control the spread of COVID-19, reduce illness and protect against variants of concern. Additionally, further vaccine eligibility is being introduced for additional high priority areas within York Region as vaccine supply and capacity permits, balanced within the ongoing vaccination of existing and new eligible priority groups.

York Region is administering COVID-19 vaccines in Phase 2 of the Province's three phase vaccine distribution plan

York Region currently has ten COVID-19 vaccine clinic sites to meet the diverse needs of York Region Residents, the week of May 10, 2021 this included:

- Eligible groups in Phase 1 of the [Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination plan](#), for example: health care workers; long-term care and retirement home residents, staff and essential care givers and indigenous adults
- Adults 40 years of age and older
- Adults living in hot spot (high priority) communities
- Individuals who can not work from home (including education staff and licenced childcare workers)
- Individuals with highest risk (including pregnant women), high-risk and at-risk chronic conditions and their care givers if applicable

Additionally, COVID-19 vaccine is being administered through:

- 37 York Region primary care providers (e.g., family physician offices/clinics). Public Health is responsible for supplying AstraZeneca to primary care providers who meet the requirements for vaccine storage and cold chain management
- 146 York Region pharmacies
- Community Paramedic teams to individuals in the Region who meet the definition of home bound
- Public Health mobile outreach teams attending workplaces. These mobile clinics are currently focused on York Region workplaces in hot spots (based upon numbers of outbreaks) and are administering vaccine to workers greater than 18 years of age. As of May 10, 2021, 25 York Region workplaces were reached by the mobile outreach teams

As of May 8, 2021, York Region has vaccinated over 50 per cent of eligible York region Residents

By May 8, 2021, 40.4% of all York Region residents and 50.5% of the eligible (aged 18 and over) York Region residents had received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine (Table 3). Working collaboratively with York Region partners, over 472,130 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered in the Region. Among long-term care home and retirement home residents, over 80% and 90% have been immunized.

Table 3
York Region vaccine coverage as of May 8, 2021

Eligible group	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (% immunized)
80 years of age and older	44,558	91.6%
75 to 79 years of age	30,690	89.8%

Eligible group	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (% immunized)
70 to 74 years of age	44,391	83.6%
65 to 69 years of age	51,004	80.2%
60 to 64 years of age	57,745	73.0%
55 to 59 years of age	56,467	60.5%
50 to 54 years of age	50,944	55.2%
45 to 49 years of age	44,658	51.3%
40 to 44 years of age	37,070	48.7%
35 to 39 years of age	27,297	36.6%
30 to 34 years of age	15,161	19.3%
25 to 29 years of age	14,783	18.4%
20 to 24 years of age	13,097	16.5%
18 to 19 years of age	3,675	10.8%
17 years old and younger	482	0.2%
Health care workers	49,373	99.1%
York Region residents 18 years of age and older	492,169	*50.5%

Data notes:

- *40.4% of all residents
- Number vaccinated includes all York Region residents who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine at any clinic in Ontario
- Data may be incomplete due to the way the reason for immunization field is captured or missing postal code information
- Health care workers who work in York Region, but do not live in York Region are also eligible for vaccination; however, these individuals are not captured in the numbers presented
- Eligible age groups are determined by resident age as of December 31st, 2021
- Proportion use population estimates provided by Environics Analytics, Demostats 2020

Vaccine delivery schedules continue to be carefully monitored by staff and appointments are adjusted accordingly

Although delivery schedules are set, schedules for some vaccines continue to change, requiring staff to adjust quickly to either ramp up or scale back (see Attachment 3 and Attachment 4). Between April 2, 2021 and May 3, 2021, 27 vaccine clinic days had to be cancelled due to supply issues.

Additionally, local municipalities and community partners continue to play a very important role in the roll out of COVID-19 vaccine for York Region residents as supply is received. Table 4 outlines York Region's COVID-19 vaccination clinic locations where [eligible individuals](#) may book an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine as supply is received and allocated to clinics.

Table 4
York Region COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics

Public Health Clinics	York Region Hospital Clinics	Community Partner Clinics
Aaniin Community Centre, City of Markham	Cornell Community Centre, City of Markham	Trisan Centre, Township of King
Canada's Wonderland Drive Through, City of Vaughan	Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, City of Vaughan	SoccerCity, Drive Through, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
Georgina Ice Palace, Town of Georgina	Ray Twinney Recreation Centre, Town of Newmarket	
Maple Community Centre, City of Vaughan		
Richmond Green Sports Centre, Town of Richmond Hill		

Public Health continues assess and align staff to meet the needs of York Region's third wave response efforts and vaccine program

With the surge of cases in wave 3, increased case numbers, Public Health continues to assess and realign staffing levels to meet the demands required for case and contact management, outbreak management and infection prevention and control measures.

Staffing continues to rely on redeployment, external recruitment, agency staffing and leveraging Paramedics Services and external primary care providers. For non-clinical roles, Public Health continues to work with local municipalities at the respective mass immunization clinic locations, in addition to staffing agencies and corporate redeployments for vaccine clinics and case, contact and outbreak management. Additionally, the Province continues to provide York Region with approximately 100 case management staff and 70 contact tracing staff from the provincial workforce pool who remain integrated into York Region's response.

In April 2021, the Region submitted a business case for Provincial funding to support all incremental costs of the Public Health response to COVID-19

Updated estimates of the public health response costs will be higher than the projections developed as part of the 2021 budget and assumed to be fully funded by the Province. On January 13, 2021, a letter from the Ministry of Health acknowledged the ongoing need for Public Health measures to monitor, detect and contain the COVID-19 response through 2021 and reaffirmed the Province's commitment to provide support for extraordinary public health costs in 2021, similar to the approach followed in 2020. The revised incremental cost estimates for York Region's COVID-19 response and mass immunization program are between \$60 million and \$90 million higher than the costs included in the 2021 budget.

In early April 2021, a business case was submitted to the Ministry of Health requesting funding for these estimated incremental costs. The estimates reflect the experience to date and projections for needs, including staffing, supplies and support costs. Projected costs for immunization are a key contributor to the cost estimates and key assumptions used to develop the budget figures include the need to deliver two doses rather than one for each vaccination and to reflect the actual experience to date regarding the Region's role in delivering immunizations. This information will be reviewed regularly and provided to the Province through quarterly reports and updated forecasts throughout the year to support the Provincial cost reimbursement process.

Public Health's focus and actions remain committed to an enhanced COVID-19 response as the York Region vaccination program continues to move forward

Through wave 3 and until the population has been vaccinated, Public Health will be required to maintain an enhanced response with case, contact and outbreak management, infection prevention and control measures and enforcing provincial legislation. Through ongoing monitoring Public Health will continue to re-evaluate and assess the current wave 3 surge model using continuous quality improvement methods to ensure a responsive model for any changes that may arise.

Ongoing collaboration with partners to support communities with higher rates of COVID-19 and joint efforts with hospital and community partners will continue to ensure York Region's [COVID-19 Vaccination Program](#) is adjusted and rolled out to meet the supply of vaccine. Adjustments will ensure continued immunization opportunities for York Region residents.

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



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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Attachments (4)

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