



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. Richard Gould, Acting Medical Officer of Health

Date: November 8, 2021

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

In [September 2021](#), Committee of the Whole received Public Health's last update to the emergency response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

This memorandum provides an update to the September 2021 memo

The COVID-19 emergency response and vaccination activities continue to be a corporate wide effort, and Public Health remains grateful to the Corporation and Regional Council for prioritizing the response and the critical supports provided. Key updates include:

- York Region vaccination rates continue to increase with over 88% of York Region residents age 12 years and older having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine
- York Region's high rates of vaccinations in the eligible population (12 years old and older) offer a strong protective effect against COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes
- Unvaccinated individuals are at significantly greater risk from COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated:
 - 12.1 times more likely to become infected
 - 18.5 times more likely to be hospitalized
 - 40.5 times more likely to die
- While still in a fourth wave, York Region is experiencing a decline in COVID-19 cases, including in institutions and workplaces after a peak in cases in early September

- York Region continues to offer community and pop-up clinics and to work with partners to promote and support inclusive access to COVID-19 vaccines and services
- Regional staff are supporting schools and childcare centres on their COVID-19 health and safety measures and rapid testing
- Work continues to prepare Public Health to handle COVID-19 as it moves to an endemic state, and to return redeployed staff so regular public health programs and services can be restored
- York Region continues to support local businesses and organizations with resources to implement COVID-19 vaccination policies and to protect workplace workers and the public from COVID-19

IMMUNIZATION AND VACCINES

Over 88% of York Region residents age 12 years and older have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine

Working collaboratively with partners, by November 7, 2021, there were 1,612,684 doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered in York Region. Over 95% of health care workers have been immunized and over 90% of long-term care home and retirement home residents have been immunized.

The coverage rate (Table 1) refers to the number of residents who have been vaccinated as a percentage of all residents aged 12 and over. Over 88.0% of eligible York Region residents age 12 and older have completed at least one dose and over 85.4% have received two doses. Residents 11 years of age and younger (12.5% of the Region's population) are excluded from this measure as they are not yet eligible for vaccine. First dose coverage rates are lower in residents 12 to 34 years of age, with only 82.7% of these residents receiving at least one dose compared to 89.7% of residents 35 to 64 years of age and 93.0% of residents aged 65 years and older.

Table 1
York Region Vaccine Coverage as of November 7, 2021

York Region residents by age group (years)	Received one dose		Received two doses	
	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (%)	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (%)
All eligible residents	918,923	88.0%	884,645	85.4%
12 to 34	288,599	82.7%	272,331	79.2%
35 to 64	440,111	89.7%	425,929	87.5%
65 and older	190,213	93.0%	186,385	91.3%

Data notes:

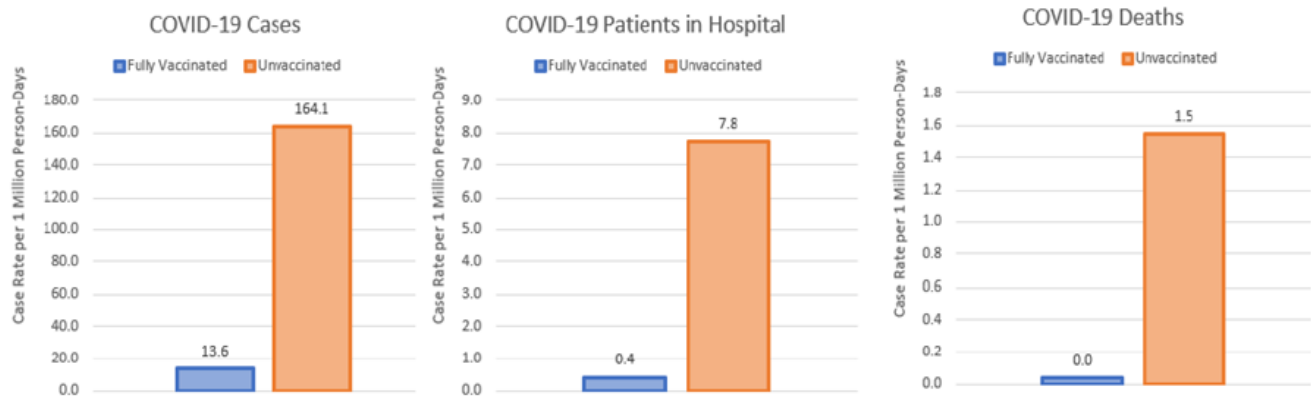
- Number vaccinated includes all York Region residents who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine at any clinic in Ontario or submitted documentation of vaccination outside of Ontario
- Data may be incomplete due to records missing public health unit or postal code information
- Eligible age groups are determined by resident age as of December 31st, 2021
- Coverage uses population estimates from Environics Analytics, Demo Stats 2021 and may differ from other sources
- The number of individuals vaccinated was extracted from the provincial COVID Vaccine (CoVax) system

Unvaccinated individuals are 12.1 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 18.5 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19, and 40.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated

Figure 1 shows York Region rates of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization and death for unvaccinated and those vaccinated with two doses, from January 1, 2021 to October 6, 2021. These rates show that vaccinations in the eligible population (12 years old and older) have offered a strong protective effect against COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes. Although vaccination greatly reduces the risk of severe symptoms, hospitalizations, and death due to COVID-19, there are various factors to consider such as pre-existing health conditions or advanced age. These factors could increase the risk of severe symptoms, hospitalizations, and death due to COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.

Figure 1

York Region COVID-19 Rates Among Vaccinated and Unvaccinated Individuals for Cases, Patients in Hospital, and Deaths (January 1, 2021 – October 6, 2021)



Data notes:

- York Region data from January 1, 2021 to October 6, 2021
- The Person-days rate is a measure of incidence that incorporates time directly into the denominator and calculates the ratio of the number of cases to the total time the population is at risk of disease; the unit of measurement is 1-million person-days
- Person-days for the interval of interest is the sum of each day any York Region resident was:
 - unvaccinated (never been vaccinated, or up to 13 days after Dose 1 date)
 - partially vaccinated (14 days after Dose 1 date to 13 days after Dose 2 date)
 - vaccinated (14 days after Dose 2 date to Dose 3 date)
 - censored or information was not available (starting one day after Dose 3 date)
- All cases are assumed to be contained within CoVaxON data. Individuals in York Region not accounted in CoVaxON data are presumed to be unvaccinated in the calculations
- To correct for the unvaccinated population in person-time, 2021 Environics Demostats population estimates were used to approximate York Region residents missing in CoVaxON

York Region is providing booster doses of COVID-19 to eligible residents

On [November 3, 2021](#), in consultation with Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Province announced eligibility for booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to additional groups of vulnerable populations if at least six months have passed since their last dose:

- Individuals aged 70 and over (born in 1951 or earlier)
- Health care workers and designated essential caregivers in congregate settings (including long-term care home and retirement home staff and designated caregivers)
- Individuals who received a complete series of a viral vector vaccine (two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine or one dose of the Janssen vaccine)
- First Nation, Inuit and Métis adults and their non-Indigenous household members (aged 16+)

York Region has expanded vaccination clinics to accommodate booster doses for eligible individuals

Booster doses in York Region are being provided by appointment only and eligible residents can book an appointment for a booster dose by visiting york.ca/COVID19Vaccine or by calling Access York at 1-877-464-9675.

To support booster doses, since November 8, 2021 community vaccination clinics in the Town of Newmarket, and the cities of Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill began to operate seven days per week with the Town of Georgina clinic continuing three days per week. Oak Valley continues to run a vaccination clinic three days per week at Markham Stouffville Hospital with plans to expand to five-day operations at the larger Cornell Community Centre site later in November 2021. Booster doses are also being provided through primary care providers, pharmacies and school hub clinics.

Additionally, pending Health Canada's approval of [Pfizer's recent submission](#) to use vaccine in children, York Region's planning includes preparing for COVID-19 vaccine roll out in children five to 11 years of age.

York Region continues to work with partners to promote and support inclusive access to COVID-19 vaccine and services

Community clinics continue to provide ongoing opportunities for those who still need one or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. Between September 1, 2021 and November 7, 2021, over 42,500 doses have been administered at community clinics and over 6,552 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered at 74 pop-up clinics that included high schools across York Region, shopping centres, Royal Canadian Legions, and community centres.

Targeted approaches to ensure inclusiveness for youth, residents under 35 years of age, newcomers and populations with elevated risk are ongoing to increase coverage rates even further include:

1. Within the provincial [Last Mile Strategy](#), the York Region COVID-19 Vaccination in Priority Populations Working Group has been coordinating targeted approaches to administer COVID-19 immunization to underserved populations in York Region, including:
 - Newcomers, persons experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, persons with substance use disorders, residents aged 25 to 29 years, and other populations identified with elevated risk
 - Working closely with internal and external stakeholders and experts in the field to create tailored messaging promoting the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for pregnant and breastfeeding individuals. Including, raising awareness of the heightened risks for those who are unvaccinated and offering pop-up clinics, as part of the Province's 'blitz week', for pregnant and breastfeeding individuals

- Reaching homebound residents and persons living in congregate settings, with mobile vaccination teams administering 175 first and second doses to homebound clients and 166 first and second doses at long-term care and retirement settings across York Region from September 1, 2021 to November 7, 2021. Additionally, 5,016 third doses were administered in long-term care and retirement homes during this period of time. These achievements are a result of collaboration between York Region Social Services, Paramedic and Senior Services and COVID-19 Vaccine Operations
- 2. The York Region Primary Care Vaccine Strategy working group continues to develop strategies to support primary care providers to increase vaccination and to administer COVID-19 vaccine. Recently, in consultation with Ontario Health, the work group began collaborating with York Region Ontario Health Teams to identify opportunities to increase COVID-19 vaccination administration for priority populations, third doses and preparing for the vaccination of children, once approved by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).
- 3. In collaboration with community leaders and champions offering vaccine through York Region's mobile teams in locations and spaces that are culturally sensitive, familiar and accessible. Mobile teams have been able to increase vaccine uptake and confidence among harder to reach populations by providing vaccine through:
 - Religious and cultural institutions, for example offering a Costi Refugee clinic, clinics for Afghan and Yazidi Refugees, and clinics through the Islamic Society of Markham, York Region Welcome Centres, the Batuil Islam Mosque in the Town of Vaughan, The Town of Georgina's Keswick United Church, and Our Lady of Grace Parish in the Town of Aurora
 - Community Centres and Other Public Spaces, Regional Legion groups, The Canadian Mental Health Association in the Towns of Aurora and Vaughan and offering special clinics for individuals who may have a fear of needles
- 4. Establishing a partnership to support the health and well-being of the Black population in York Region. Through a series of engagements with the community throughout the pandemic, it has been established that a broader public health approach to engage, develop relationships, and establish a strategy to support black health outcomes is needed. Currently, York Region is working with the community to address vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccine uptake. This initiative is in collaboration with York Region's Community and Health Services Department, Strategies and Partnerships Branch, in support of the Region's framework to address anti-Black racism.

Additionally, York Region High Priority Strategy partners -- CareFirst and Vaughan Community Health Centre -- recently delivered two training sessions to 358 Public Health Case and Contact Management Staff. The training provided the teams with information regarding what wrap arounds supports their organization can provide to COVID-19 cases and their families as well as how clients can access their services.

COVID-19 CASES IN YORK REGION

York Region has been experiencing a decline in COVID-19 cases after a peak in cases in early September

In late July 2021, York Region saw an increase in cases week over week, reaching a peak in the daily average of cases of 81.6 cases during the week of August 22, 2021 to August 28, 2021. Since the end of August 2021, cases have been steadily declining and reached a daily average of 35.3 cases the week of November 2, 2021 to November 8, 2021 (Attachment 1).

Since early September, travel-related cases (cases determined to have acquired COVID-19 infection through travel) have been declining, the number of workplace outbreaks continues to be low, and York Region continues to experience low institutional outbreak numbers. A consistent decrease in new infections, associated hospitalizations and deaths has been observed in institutional residents. High rates of vaccination in long-term care and retirement homes, and congregate living settings have reduced morbidity and mortality in residents.

As of November 3, 2021, modelling (Attachment 2) projects that with reopening and some reductions in public health measures, York Region cases of COVID-19 may increase slightly to an average of 63 daily cases and 36 weekly cases per 100,000 population by December 20, 2021. The number of COVID-19 cases among unvaccinated residents has been steadily declining. The risk continues to be higher for unvaccinated residents.

Table 2 provides York Region's current average number of new COVID-19 cases per day, weekly incidence rate, positivity rate, reproductive number (Rt) and outbreaks by setting. The Delta variant remains as the dominant strain in York Region, with greater than 98% of cases identified as either confirmed or presumed Delta strain based on mutation screening.

Table 2
York Region COVID-19 Indicators as of November 8, 2021

Indicators	York Region Status
*Average new COVID-19 cases per day	35.3
*Weekly incidence rate per 100,000 residents	20.6
**Per cent (%) positivity	1.8
***Reproductive number (Rt)	1.11
****Active outbreaks	18
****Institutional outbreaks	0
****Workplace outbreaks	4
****School outbreaks	11
****Childcare centre outbreaks	3
****Day program outbreaks	0

Indicators	York Region Status
****Camps	0

Data notes

- * For the week of November 2 to 8, 2021
- ** For the week of November 1 to 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, October 29, 2021 based on Estimated date of Infection. Rt for all strains combined with the assumption that the Delta variant is now the dominant strain
- **** Total active confirmed outbreaks as of November 5, 2021

CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

Cases among children under the age of 12 have been increasing since August 1, 2021 with no hospitalizations in the last 30 days

COVID-19 cases among children under age 12 in York Region have followed the same pattern of overall case counts since July 2021. During the period of August 1, 2021 to November 7, 2021, 935 cases were among children aged 12 years and under. In September 2021, five hospitalizations among children under age 12 were seen for the first time since early June 2021. In the last 30 days, there have been no hospitalizations among under age 12. Among cases in this age group, COVID-19 is more commonly acquired through close contact (48.6%), followed by school outbreaks (18.4%).

COVID-19 outbreaks in schools now account for more than half of all active outbreaks within York Region

Outbreaks in school settings have increased from no confirmed outbreaks on September 6, 2021 to 11 outbreaks on November 5, 2021, with a return to in-person in September and the increased transmissibility of variants of concern. During the same period, the number of outbreaks in childcare centres has decreased slightly to three confirmed outbreaks on November 5, 2021, from five outbreaks on September 6, 2021, with cases being primarily in children not eligible for immunization.

Since the return of the school year from September 1, 2021 to November 5, 2021, York Region has followed up on 66 confirmed outbreaks. Of the confirmed outbreaks, 34 were in schools and 10 were in childcare settings, three were camps or day programs, one institutional setting and 18 workplaces. Trends of non-compliance in inspections at these settings have included improper use of high-level disinfectants, lack of adherence to masking requirements, and improper set up of isolation rooms for symptomatic staff or students/attendees. Public Health continues to provide consultation and education on infection prevention and control measures during inspections which assist in keeping case numbers low in schools.

SUPPORTING YORK REGION SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

York Region has transitioned back to using the Ontario COVID-19 School Screening Tool

As a proactive measure and out of an abundance of caution, York Region started the 2021 to 2022 school year using a revised COVID-19 screening tool that included additional symptoms beyond those listed in the provincial screening tool. This conservative approach helped ensure individuals with mild symptoms (such as runny nose and sore throat), would not be permitted to attend school and childcare settings. These mild symptoms were added given their associated outcomes with childcare centre and camp outbreaks over the summer months.

On October 18, 2021, York Region transitioned back to the Ontario COVID-19 School Screening Tool. This was completed to align York Region with other health units across the province, create consistencies for individuals living in York Region but attending facilities in other jurisdictions and to recognize the positive improvements made provincially to include more symptoms for reasons individuals should not attend school.

Additional testing capacity for school and childcare centre attendees available in York Region

Thanks to a collaborative effort between York Region District School Board, York Catholic District School Board, Ontario Health Central Region and York Region Public Health, two testing locations have been set up in York Region for school and childcare centre attendees. The two locations are in schools in the City of Vaughan (St. Jean de Brebeuf) and Town of Aurora (George Street Public School). Operated twice a week at each location, these drop-in centres allow individuals to get a PCR test if they are symptomatic, asymptomatic, or if they are part of an exposed/dismissed cohort. The after-hours testing options have increased available testing opportunities to those most in need of testing to help ensure a timely return to school, while waiting for the vaccination opportunities to be made available to these age groups.

The Provincial Government is deploying rapid antigen tests to school boards across the province

On [October 5, 2021](#), the provincial government announced increasing access to rapid antigen screening for school-aged students through participating public health units where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is high. York Region Public Health is currently reviewing local data and the new guidance in collaboration with school board partners as well as consulting with other health units across the province for a consistent approach to deploying these tests.

Rapid antigen tests are only appropriately used among individuals not experiencing symptoms or not part of a dismissed cohort or with a high-risk exposure to a confirmed case. These rapid antigen tests cannot be used in fully vaccinated individuals either due to increased risk of false positive findings. Symptomatic individuals should continue to get tested at one of three COVID-19 Assessment Centres in York Region. Rapid antigen screening is not a substitute for PCR

testing at an assessment centre if a child is feeling ill with any symptoms of COVID-19, or if they have had a high-risk exposure.

COVID-19 CASE, CONTACT AND OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

York Region Public Health continues to apply robust and targeted case, contact and outbreak management practices

To help flatten the growth of the curve associated with the fourth wave, Public Health has continued to apply targeted measures to help reduce opportunities for COVID-19 transmission. Some of these include continuing Public Health's nine-step prioritization model and updating letters of instruction and section 22 orders to reflect current Provincial guidance. These efforts continue to be vigorously applied as York Region transitions through the fourth wave. While York Region has seen some increases in case counts and outbreaks associated with larger gatherings, the Region has not had significant activity in school or institutional settings, which is reassuring as we enter into the normal respiratory virus season (e.g., influenza, rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)).

York Region continues to support local businesses and organizations to protect workers and the public from COVID-19

York Region recommends all local employers implement a workplace COVID-19 vaccination policy to protect workers and the public from COVID-19. This recommendation applies to those employers not included within related provincial vaccine policy directives. To support local businesses and organizations, resources, including recommendations for establishing a COVID-19 Workplace Vaccination Policy and Sample Policy Template, are available through [Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#). In the event that a COVID-19 case has attended a local business or organization, Public Health sends them a Response Checklist for Workplaces that provides guidance and resources related to management of COVID-19 positive cases and close contacts in the workplace, guidance for employers managing workers within 48 hours of COVID-19 immunization, workplace control measures and COVID-19 vaccination information. Additionally, a [Letter of Instruction](#) has been sent to all York Region businesses and workplaces with respect to following best practices and supporting the vaccination of their staff, in addition to cooperating with Public Health on COVID-19 contract tracing efforts.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES

York Region Public Health is supporting schools, camps, and childcare settings

Infection control professionals continue to ensure the implementation of screening, cohorting, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection in these premises. These settings also continue to be supported when an outbreak has been declared, to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. York Region staff are also working in collaboration with schools and childcare settings with vaccine promotion and to ensure that immunization policies have been implemented and continue to set up vaccination clinics to provide convenient access to vaccines for eligible students and their families, as well as educators and school staff.

COVID-19 preparedness assessments are being completed in York Region congregate settings

As of October 18, 2021, all York Region long-term care homes had received an on-site infection prevention and control (IPAC) COVID-19 preparedness assessment. As part of these visits long-term care homes are required to provide an action plan to York Region Public Health outlining how they plan to address non-compliance in IPAC measures noted during the preparedness visit. Public Health's IPAC mobile team continues to work with long-term care homes and other community stakeholders such as local IPAC Hubs and the Ministry of Long-Term Care to ensure continued IPAC support to those settings where IPAC non-compliance is observed. Additionally, Public Health's IPAC mobile response team is continuing with COVID-19 preparedness work by conducting IPAC COVID-19 preparedness assessments in York Region retirement homes and in other congregates settings.

IPAC training for essential caregivers had been developed

Operators of congregate living settings (e.g., long term care homes, retirement homes, shelters, group homes, supportive housing) are required to provide IPAC education and training to volunteers and essential visitors. To support all congregate settings in meeting this requirement, Public Health has developed an easy to understand, general IPAC [Essential Caregivers, Visitors and Families at Group Living Home](#) training course for essential caregivers, families, and visitors to congregate living settings. This four-part course covers: how infections spread; practices to follow when visiting a group living home; practices to follow during caregiving activities like feeding and laundry; and practices to follow when caring for a sick resident or during an outbreak. Proof of completion will be provided to participants once they have completed this training. Participants can provide the proof of completion to Operators of congregate settings.

RE-OPENING THE PROVINCE AND ENFORCEMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

The Province remains in Step 3 of the Reopening Ontario Road Map

The Province currently remains in [Step 3](#) of the Reopen Ontario Road Map. In consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health on [October 22, 2021](#) the Province released [A Plan to Safely Reopen Ontario and Manage COVID-19 for the Long-Term](#), which outlines the Province's gradual approach to lifting remaining public health and workplace safety measures by March 2022. The plan will be guided by the ongoing assessment of key public health and health care indicators and supported by local or regional tailored responses to COVID-19.

York Region continues to enforce COVID-19 related requirements in the *Reopening Ontario Act, 2020* and the *Health Protection and Promotion Act, 1990*

To assist with reducing the spread of COVID-19, orders and instructions for York Region residents and businesses that continue to remain in effect include:

- [Section 22 Class Order](#) under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act* requiring isolation for persons testing positive for COVID-19 and persons with symptoms of COVID-19. They must also cooperate in assisting case and contact management
- [Section 22 Class Order](#) under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act* all persons responsible for hosting social gatherings at private and/or commercial gatherings to maintain a list of names and contact information for attendees
- [Letter of Instruction](#) for all York Region businesses and workplaces with respect to following best practices and supporting the vaccination of their staff, in addition to cooperating with Public Health COVID-19 contract tracing efforts
- [Letter of Instruction](#) for all Licensed Child Care Centres, Licensed Home Child Care providers, before and after school programs operating in schools or educational settings and EarlyON Child and Family Centres across York Region with respect to daily COVID-19 screening, masking and physical distancing, attendance records, persons entering a premise, and cooperation with York Region Public Health
- [Letter of Instruction](#) for all persons responsible for facilities where organized sports are played and/or practiced with respect to requiring each person, age 12 years and older, at the point of entry, to provide identification and proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or a valid medical exemption and to comply with all other requirements under the *Reopening Ontario Act* and its regulations that apply to the Facility

During the period of August 24, 2021 and October 31, 2021, there were 3,078 inspections and investigations conducted by Public Health, and 23 charges were issued under the *Reopening Ontario Act* for non-compliance. Public Health continues to work closely with Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers and the Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario.

An educational initiative with a primary focus on proof of vaccination requirements was conducted with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, Public Health and Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers between October 28, 2021 to October 30, 2021. Over the course of the initiative, there were 297 premises visited. Of those premises visited, 14 tickets were issued under the *Reopening Ontario Act* for lack of COVID-19 safety plan, contact list not being maintained, and lack of active screening. Education was provided to operators to update their COVID-19 safety plans to include the proof of vaccination requirement.

Overall, between March 18, 2020 and November 7, 2021 combined efforts of [enforcing COVID-19 regulations](#) by York Region's COVID-19 enforcement task force members and York Region Transit has resulted in 74,495 inspections, 32,398 education activities and 1,544 charges.

York Region is preparing for an endemic state of COVID-19 and the gradual resumption of public health services

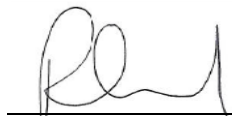
Public Health continues to maintain a COVID-19 response, provide access to COVID-19 vaccination and to reinforce the importance for all individuals, even those who have been vaccinated, to continue to follow public health advice.

As York Region moves towards an endemic state of COVID-19, organizational changes are underway to ensure aspects of the COVID-19 emergency response that continue to be needed for endemic control, including case management and vaccination, will continue as part of a new, normalized structure. A new temporary Public Health COVID-19 division is being established to continue to oversee most aspects of the COVID-19 response currently handled by the Health Emergency Operations Centre. These changes will allow for an ongoing response and work to restore Public Health Services reduced or paused during the pandemic. Additional details will be included as part of the Region's and department's 2022 budget presentation.

For more information on the memo, please contact Dr. Richard Gould, Acting Medical Officer of Health, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 76401.



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Dr. Richard Gould
Acting Medical Officer of Health



Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments (2)
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