



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. Barry Pakes Medical Officer of Health

Date: February 10, 2022

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

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In [November 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 November 2021 memo**

COVID-19 remains an unprecedented situation with the identification of the Omicron variant in Ontario in November 2021. York Region continues to take decisive and meaningful steps to protect residents, mitigate the rate of illness and death from COVID-19, and to ease impacts on hospitals and the broader health system.

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

- York Region vaccination rates continue to increase with over 87% of York Region residents having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and among the five to 11 age group 60% have received their first dose and 83% of residents have received two doses
- Booster doses have been administered to almost 50% of eligible 18+ residents. Work continues to actively encourage residents to receive the booster dose, and appointments are accessible at all of our mass immunization sites.
- The booster dose provides 90-95% protection against hospitalization and severe disease due to COVID-19 infection.

- Unvaccinated individuals in York Region remain at greater risk than those who are vaccinated with two doses of vaccine:
  - two times more likely to become infected
  - 13.2 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19
  - 17.4 times more likely to die from COVID-19
- Efforts to increase vaccination coverage in children aged five to 11 years and booster doses remain a priority through community, mobile and mass immunization clinics.
- Regional staff continue to work with partners to promote and support access to COVID-19 vaccines.
- With the highly transmissible and rapid spread of the Omicron variant, York Region has experienced a sharp increase in cases, including a higher number of institutional outbreaks than during previous waves of the pandemic.
- Given the magnitude of Omicron, Public Health has streamlined resources to focus case, contact and outbreak management in institutional and congregate settings
- York Region continues to enforce COVID-19 related requirements in the *Reopening Ontario Act, 2020*, carry out education initiatives for business and prepare for the arrival of International Agricultural Workers

### **Over 60% of York Region five- to 11-year-olds have received at least one dose and almost 47% of all eligible residents over the age of 18 have received a third dose**

Working collaboratively with partners, as of February 5, 2022, 2,159,649 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in York Region, including third doses for those eligible. The coverage rate (Table 1) refers to the number of residents vaccinated as a percentage of all residents aged five and over.

As of February 5, 2022, over 87% of eligible (five years old and over) York Region residents have received at least one dose and 83% of eligible residents have received two doses. On December 20, 2021, third doses became available for all residents 18 years old and older, and coverage has reached 47% among this population in York Region.

Among the five to 11 age group over 60% have received their first dose. On January 18, 2022, children in this age group became eligible for a second dose of vaccine. As of February 5, 2022, second dose coverage has already surpassed 24% and continues to rise. Specifically, half of children who received their first dose, who are now eligible, have received their second dose.

**Table 1**  
**York Region Vaccine Coverage as of February 5, 2022**

York Region residents by age group (years)	Received one dose		Received two doses		Received three doses	
	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (%)	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (%)	Number vaccinated	Coverage rate (%)
All eligible residents*	1,004,842	88%	952,878	83%	541,531	47%
5 to 11	54,811	60%	22,322	25%	NA	NA
12 to 17	80,891	90%	78,478	88%	NA	NA
18 to 49	441,165	89%	430,897	87%	228,085	46%
50 to 69	294,546	90%	290,032	89%	204,497	62%
70 and older	133,429	95%	131,149	94%	107,258	77%

\*Includes residents aged five years and older for one and two dose coverage numbers and rates, and residents aged 18 years and older for dose three coverage and rates

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 31<sup>st</sup>, 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

## Efforts to increase vaccination coverage in children aged five to 11 remains a high priority

On November 26, 2021, in alignment with the Province, York Region began immunizing five to 11-year-olds with Pfizer's (Comirnaty) pediatric vaccine. Child-friendly features were incorporated into the clinics including music, stickers, colouring sheets, and a selfie-station. Throughout November and December 2021, school-based clinics operating outside of school hours also ran to increase access to vaccination for this age group with 14,103 doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered at 38 school-based clinics. School-based clinics were discontinued as of December 26, 2021 to re-introduce mass-immunization clinics aimed at increasing third-dose coverage.

On January 12, 2022, the Provincial government reissued an expectation for public health units to host in-school vaccination clinics for individuals aged five to 11 in partnership with school board partners. This included to work collaboratively to identify schools to host in-school clinics during school hours. York Region has been working with school boards to plan pilot school vaccination clinics. Pilot school clinics will be open to only students who attend the pilot school during regular school hours. Children aged five to 11 will only be vaccinated during school hours

if a parent or legal guardian completes a consent form. Pilot school clinics will also be open for public bookings for children from other schools and their families, with walk-in capability for first and second doses during afterschool hours (e.g., 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.). In addition to piloting school-based clinics during school hours, York Region is also working with the school boards to provide a communication to parents with information about the importance and safety of COVID vaccination and where they can get their children vaccinated and to complete a needs assessment that will help develop future strategies for increasing immunization in children aged five to 11.

### **Community and mass immunization clinics provide ongoing opportunities for those needing a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including third doses**

On December 20, 2021, the Province announced age eligibility for booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to include individuals aged 18 and over and other vulnerable populations as follows:

- Vulnerable older adults in congregate living settings
- Health Care Workers and Designated Essential Caregivers [as identified by the Ministry of Health](#)
- First Nations, Inuit and Metis and non-indigenous household members aged 16 and older
- Those who received a complete series of viral vector vaccine (e.g., two doses of AstraZeneca vaccine or one dose of Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine)
- Those who received two doses of a vaccine not approved by Health Canada

### **The Region is appreciative for the ongoing collaboration and partnership with local Municipalities in the planning and operation of COVID-19 mass vaccination clinics to meet the increased demand for immunization**

With significant coverage of the 70 and over population completed, on January 10, 2022, Public Health expanded booster eligibility to individuals aged 18 and over. With the shift to booster doses, York Region in partnership with Local Municipalities, reintroduced mass immunization clinics and between mass and community clinics:

- Over 112,689 doses of the vaccine were administered at community clinics between November 1, 2021, and February 5, 2022
- Over 78,469 doses of the vaccine have been administered in mass immunization clinics since December 26, 2021
- To support a safe return to in-person learning, on January 15 to 16, 2022 York Region offered priority booking for vaccine administration to education sector staff

Additionally, through a collaborative effort of Paramedic and Senior Services and COVID-19 Vaccine Operations, a total of 5,192 third doses have been administered to staff and residents in the region's long-term care and retirement homes.

## **York Region continues to immunize highest risk and most vulnerable York Region residents**

York Region mobile teams continue to reach homebound residents and persons living in congregate settings, with mobile vaccination teams now administering third doses. These efforts resulted in the administration of 842 doses to homebound clients across York Region between November 1, 2021, and February 5, 2022.

On [December 30, 2021](#), the Provincial government announced that based on recommendations from the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee, [fourth doses](#) of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines would be offered to residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and other congregate care settings if at least three months (84 days) have passed since their third booster dose.

A fourth dose of vaccine will provide additional protection against COVID-19 and variants for some of the highest risk and most vulnerable York Region residents. To further protect vulnerable individuals, the Province has also mandated booster doses for all staff, students, volunteers, caregivers and support workers in long-term care and other congregate settings by March 14, 2022. All visitors will also be required to provide proof of a booster dose once the temporary pause on general visitors is lifted. Long-term care and retirement home facilities will order vaccines from Public Health and provide fourth doses to their residents and Public Health will assist to provide fourth doses on-site for facilities requiring support.

## **York Region continues to work with community and Provincial partners to promote and support access to COVID-19 vaccines**

The Region continues to support and promote vaccines in high priority communities, address vaccine hesitancy and incorporate diversity and inclusion considerations critical to the success of the Region's immunization efforts by:

1. **Delivering on the Provincially funded High Priority Communities Strategy:** Two lead community health agencies, Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association and Vaughan Community Health Centre, continue to lead outreach to residents, conduct case management and help residents to access services and COVID-19 testing. Provincial funding for Lead Agencies is set to end on March 31, 2022.
2. **Having community and self-isolation supports available:** The Region continues to monitor community trends and disseminate information to partners through the [COVID-19 Community Coordination \(3C\) Tables](#) and other collaborative networks, facilitate and increase awareness of available [COVID-19 Community Supports](#), and provide funding supports to community agencies to help address resident needs. As part of continued implementation of the High Priority Communities Strategy, the Region has partnered

with Peel Region since June 2021 to provide [supports to York Region residents](#) needing to self-isolate. Services at Peel's COVID-19 Voluntary Isolation Housing remain available but are scheduled to end on March 31, 2022.

3. **Increasing vaccine confidence:** The Region continues to work with community partners to develop and deliver targeted vaccination efforts focusing on addressing vaccine hesitancy among identified groups.

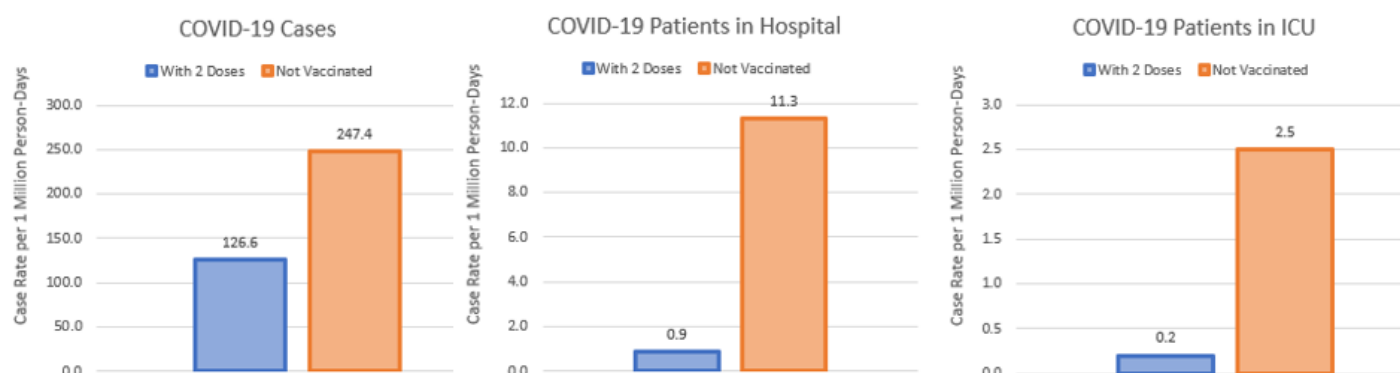
York Region continues to identify locations and communities that would benefit from targeted, mobile options to increase vaccine uptake. Translated promotional materials, townhalls, community ambassadors and volunteers are instrumental to the success of community clinics and getting the word out about Provincial changes such as COVID-19 testing and wrap around supports such as access to food, vaccine booking, financial, mental health and social supports and referrals to the Volunteer Isolation Centre.

## RISK OF SEVERE OUTCOMES

**Unvaccinated individuals are two times more likely to contract COVID-19, 13.2 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19, and 17.4 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than those with two doses of vaccine**

Figure 1 shows York Region rates of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization and death for residents who are not vaccinated and those vaccinated with two doses, from August 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021. These results demonstrate vaccinations in the population 12 years old and over have offered a protective effect against severe outcomes due to COVID-19. Although vaccination reduces the risk of severe symptoms, hospitalizations, and death due to COVID-19, there are various risks such as pre-existing health conditions or advanced age that could increase the risk of severe symptoms, hospitalizations, and death due to COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.

**Figure 1**  
**COVID-19 rates of infection and severity by vaccination status, York Region (12 years old and over), August 1 – December 31, 2021**



Data notes:

- These calculations include data of residents over the age of 12, and excludes five-to-11-year old's who are eligible for vaccination
- 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 one-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)
  - with two doses (14 days after Dose 2 date to within 14 days of 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

## **COVID-19 CASES IN YORK REGION**

### **Case counts continue to be high but are no longer a reliable metric to track the progression of the pandemic due to changes in Provincial testing eligibility**

In mid-December 2021, York Region saw a sharp increase in daily cases, reaching an all-time daily high of 1,538 cases on December 31, 2021. With the shift in dominant strain from the Delta variant to the Omicron variant, high case counts continued into early 2022. As of January 1, 2022, case counts, incidence rate, and percent positivity are not a reliable metric due to Provincial eligibility changes for PCR testing.

### **As hospitalizations have increased, this metric is now the focus of monitoring the progression of the pandemic**

The number of patients (including both York Region residents and non-York Region residents) in York Region hospitals has increased following the recent rise in case counts to a weekly average of 176 patients as of January 16, 2022. In the weeks following, the weekly average decreased, but as of February 5, 2022, remains high compared to late 2021. This demonstrates an increased pressure on the hospital system in York Region compared to early December (Attachment 1). Hospital capacity and hospitalizations are important pandemic measurements to monitor because they speak to the level of pressure on the local health system. In York Region most hospitalizations continue to occur among residents who are not vaccinated, although there has been an increase in hospitalizations among residents with two doses. Additionally:

- In the most recent complete week (January 30, 2022- February 5, 2022), most hospitalizations were among York Region residents over the age of 70
- Children under the age of five are ineligible for vaccination and the number of hospitalizations among this group increased over the last several weeks, which was not observed at any other point in the pandemic
- The number of ICU admissions due to COVID-19 among York Region residents has increased and is currently made up of both not vaccinated and those with two or more doses of the vaccine
- Although the overall number of deaths due to COVID-19 remains low, it was higher in January 2022 compared to late 2021 and deaths will continue to be monitored

The highly transmissible Omicron variant has infected considerably larger numbers of unvaccinated and vaccinated people. Combined with changes in testing eligibility, case tracking has become impossible to maintain reliably. Hospitalization is a more reliable indicator of the pandemic's progression. As of February 4, 2022, modelling projects that hospitalizations have peaked in mid-January and are expected to decrease into February. Daily new hospital admissions are expected to reach an average of 15 daily hospitalizations, or nine weekly hospitalizations per 100,000 population by February 14, 2022.

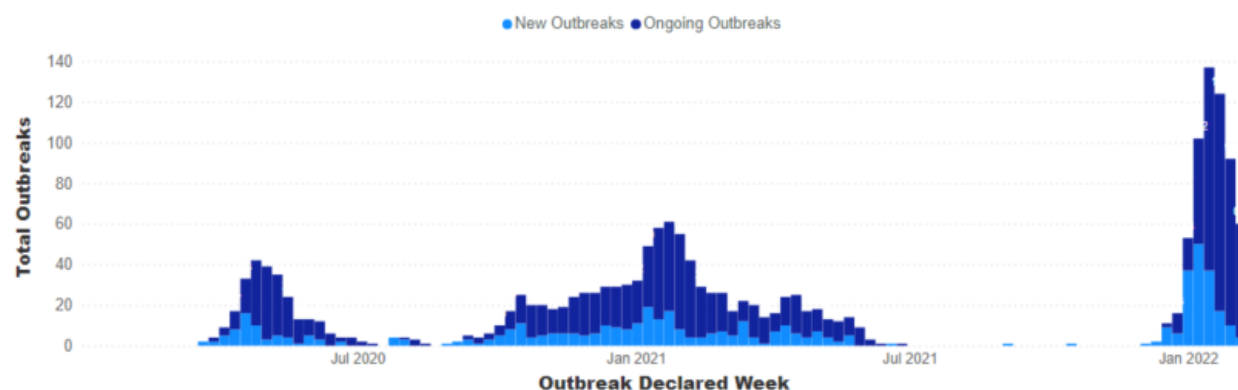
On January 24, 2022, Public Health updated the [COVID-19 in York Region](#) reporting dashboard to reflect current pandemic measures. The dashboard now prioritizes hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive individuals in York Region hospitals (including those in ICU) as well as outbreaks in institutional settings.

### **Outbreaks in institutional settings have sharply increased, prompting a shift to prioritize these settings for follow-up**

There has been a significant increase in the number of institutional outbreaks over the last month. The number of institutional outbreaks over the last complete week (January 30, 2022, to February 5, 2022) was 60 and remains higher compared to late 2021. The majority (60%) of confirmed institutional outbreaks occurred in retirement homes and long-term care homes in this time frame. Increases in outbreaks have also been seen among all other settings types with group homes, shelters and supported independent living homes reaching new high numbers of outbreaks.

Staff cases are driving case counts in retirement and long-term care home settings, making up more than 65% of all cases in these settings. Furthermore, about a third of outbreaks in these settings are due solely to staff cases.

**Figure 2**  
**COVID-19 Outbreaks in Institutional Settings, York Region, February 1, 2020 – February 5, 2022**



\*Only confirmed outbreaks are shown



## COVID-19 CASE, CONTACT AND OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

### **Due to the magnitude of Omicron, Public Health is focusing case, contact, and outbreak management practices on institutional and congregate settings**

On December 30, 2021, the Chief Medical Officer of Health announced updated interim case, contact, and outbreak management guidelines due to the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant. With this announcement all public health units, including York Region, have been required to pause investigating cases not associated with highest risk settings (e.g., travel, school, workplace and community exposure related cases and contacts). Public Health has shifted focus and streamlined case, contact and outbreak management resources to focus investigating cases and contacts associated with those most vulnerable and at risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 following [Provincial guidance](#), including:

- Hospitals and health care settings, including complex continuing care facilities and acute care facilities
- Congregate living settings, for example, long-term care homes, retirement homes, group homes, shelters, hospices, and temporary foreign worker settings
- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities
- Paramedics and health care workers providing care to immunocompromised individuals

With this change, Public Health is supporting institutional and congregate settings through initial contact and daily follow up and has implemented a surge model to meet the demand. Public Health also continues to:

- Evaluate and streamline case and contact management processes
- Reallocate staffing resources to support highest risk settings and to refer and receive cases for these settings through Provincial Workforce Pool (PWF) staff
- Updating information and linkages to Provincial resources for workplaces and businesses through [Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)
- Ensuring the [COVID-19 Positive](#) webpage is a current and accurate source of information for York Region residents
- Implementing the use of Public Health's rave electronic notification systems to notify cases of their positive status and provide direction and information

## SUPPORTING YORK REGION SCHOOLS, CHILDCARE AND CONGREGATE SETTINGS

On January 10, 2022 the Ministry of Health released [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge](#). York Region Public Health continues to work closely with York Region school boards and private schools to support the health, safety, and well-being of our

school and childcare community. To support publicly funded and private schools returning to in-person learning on Monday, January 17, 2022, Public Health:

- Hosted webinars for school boards and operators to support the transition to return to school
- Distributed a resource package to support schools in applying new guidance changes. The package included resources to support staff and families in understanding the new requirements for managing symptoms of illness and self-isolation of symptomatic individuals and their household contacts
- Maintained Public Health school-focused staff capacity to address school administrator inquiries

Additionally, with the recent guideline changes to how COVID-19 will be monitored and managed in childcare centres, Public Health:

- Hosted a webinar to support operators in applying the changes
- Distributed a resource package to childcare operators that provided information for operators to support staff and families in understanding the new requirements for managing symptoms of illness and self-isolation of symptomatic individuals and their household contacts

## **York Region is preparing for the arrival of International Agricultural Workers**

York Region Public Health annually inspects accommodations at 73 farms with 180 different congregate living units for approximately 700 International Agricultural Workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program managed by Service Canada. Since 2020, York Region Public Health has supported farms with International Agricultural Workers living in congregate settings through inspections, COVID-19 spot checks, dedicated vaccination clinics, outbreak management, key messaging, and mobile testing. In 2021, there were 11 outbreaks associated with these settings, mostly travel associated, and one worker death.

In January 2022, two dedicated vaccine booster clinics were arranged for International Agricultural Workers not yet vaccinated at the airport upon arrival. Public Health is also reviewing Ministry of Health outbreak guidelines for agricultural settings and preparing key messaging on IPAC precautions, outbreak management and isolation requirements. Key messaging will be sent to farms through Public Health's alert notification system and to key stakeholders including all grower associations. COVID-19 spot checks will continue at farms once workers have cleared their federal quarantine and travel requirements and work is underway to provide mobile testing and rapid antigen test kits to farms with International Agricultural Workers.

## **INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES**

### **York Region Public Health is supporting schools, and emergency childcare settings**

Infection control professionals continue to ensure the implementation of appropriate Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures in these settings. These facilities continue to be supported when an outbreak has been declared or high absenteeism has been identified, to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. York Region staff are actively conducting on-site inspections in the ten licensed childcare centres that have been approved by the Ministry of Education for the Target Emergency Child Care Program. These emergency childcare centres, offered to school aged children of eligible health care worker and front-line staff, are assessed for compliance with required IPAC measures and are provided with on-site education.

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

As of November 2021, all 29 Long-term Care homes and 41 Retirement homes received onsite IPAC assessments and during the 2021 holiday season, all congregate settings received an IPAC education resource reminding them of IPAC measures.

Public Health's IPAC mobile response team continues to support congregate settings by meeting with the 44 York Region group homes with 10 or more residents to discuss IPAC preparedness. Each of these homes also received an onsite IPAC preparedness assessment. The team also continues to work with congregate settings and other community stakeholders, such as local IPAC Hubs and the appropriate Ministries, to ensure continued IPAC support for those settings where IPAC non-compliance is observed.

Additionally, the IPAC mobile response team is continuing with COVID-19 preparedness work by ensuring York Region's 77 smaller group homes with 10 or less residents receive IPAC preparedness phone consultation. Homes identified as needing further IPAC support are then prioritized for an onsite assessment.

## **RE-OPENING THE PROVINCE AND ENFORCEMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES**

### **On January 20, 2022, the Ontario government announced a gradual easing of modified step two restrictions of its Roadmap to Reopen**

On January 5, 2022, time-limited measures were put into place until [January 27, 2022](#) to ease the transmission of Omicron and prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed as efforts to rollout booster doses and immunization of five to 11-year-olds continues. The plan continues to 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.

Following this, on January 20, 2022 the Province announced a cautious and gradual easing of public health measures, to begin [January 31, 2022](#), with further easing of measures on February 21, 2022 and on March 12, 2022.

During modified step two, the Ontario Regulation 263/20 under the *Reopening Ontario Act* has remained in effect. This has prohibited some indoor activities including indoor dining and reduced business capacity, and social gathering limits. York Region has sent educational resources to food establishments, fitness and recreational facilities, retail stores including shopping malls, and personal services settings via an electronic notification system.

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

To assist with reducing the spread of COVID-19, one letter of instruction remains in effect. All persons responsible for facilities where organized sports are played and/or practiced are required to follow the [Letter of Instruction](#) issued by York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

Additionally, York Region has sent educational resources to food establishments, fitness and recreational facilities, retail stores including shopping malls, and personal services settings through electronic notification detailing the public health measures that are currently in place.

During the period of November 1, 2021, and February 4, 2022, there were 1381 inspections and investigations conducted by Public Health and 27 charges were issued under the *Reopening Ontario Act* for non-compliance. Public Health has continued to work closely with Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers and the Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario. Educational initiatives since November 2021's update have included:

- Providing education to ice arenas regarding their roles and responsibilities under the *Reopening Ontario Act*. This initiative was conducted with Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers on November 27, 2021 and December 4, 2021. Thirty-three ice arenas were visited, and education was provided to operators for updating their COVID-19 safety plans to include the proof of vaccination requirement and education regarding maintaining physical distancing in change rooms and washrooms
- Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers focused on big box stores between December 29, 2021 to December 31, 2021. This initiative focused on capacity limits, masking, physical distancing, and the COVID-19 safety plan at these retailers. Over the course of the initiative, there were 62 premises visited. Of these premises visited, one ticket was issued under the *Reopening Ontario Act* for failure to comply with capacity limits

Overall, between November 1, 2021 to January 30, 2022 combined efforts of [enforcing COVID-19 regulations](#) by York Region's COVID-19 enforcement task force members and York Region Transit has resulted in 3,808 inspections, 2,094 education activities and 60 charges.

### **York Region remains committed to the ongoing COVID-19 response efforts and continues progress in vaccinations**

COVID-19 remains a high-risk disease of public health significance. Public Health continues to adapt and make changes to COVID-19 response efforts to ease impacts on hospitals and the

broader health system, and to provide access to COVID-19 vaccination. Public Health will continue to reinforce the importance of vaccination for all eligible individuals and for all individuals to continue to follow public health advice. Public Health will continue to take decisive and meaningful steps to protect residents, mitigate the rate of illness and death from COVID-19, assess next steps in the COVID-19 emergency response and planning for the resumption of public health services when the response stabilizes.

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



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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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Dr. Barry Pakes  
Medical Officer of Health



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Bruce Macgregor  
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment (1)  
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