



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: April 21, 2022

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

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In [February 2022](#) 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 February 2022 memo**

COVID-19 remains an unprecedented situation and Ontario has entered a sixth wave of the pandemic. York Region continues to be actively engaged in the pandemic response.

The COVID-19 pandemic 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 88% of York Region residents having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and over 85% of residents having received two doses. Three doses have been administered to 57% of eligible residents aged 12 years and older
- As of April 7, 2022, York Region began offering fourth doses to eligible individuals aged 60 years and over, First Nation, Inuit and Métis individuals and their non-Indigenous household members aged 18 years and older. As of April 19, 2022, 24,601 York Region residents have received a fourth dose
- Public Health has been monitoring the spread of COVID-19 through three key indicators; wastewater surveillance, hospitalizations, and institutional outbreaks, all of which are trending upwards. COVID-19 related deaths continue to decline and remain stable

- Mass immunizations clinics have transitioned to smaller, community-based clinics within five York Region offices located within the Towns of Georgina and Newmarket, and the Cities of Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill
- York Region continues to support the implementation of appropriate infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices in highest risk communal settings, schools, childcare centres, farms with international agricultural workers and recreational camps
- As masking requirements under a *Reopening Ontario Act, 2020* regulation were lifted on March 14, 2022, for most indoor businesses and organizations, Public Health has actively messaged a strong recommendation that residents wear masks when indoors, including students and staff in school settings

### **Wastewater surveillance, hospitalizations and confirmed institutional outbreak indicators are trending upwards**

Case counts have not been a reliable measure to track the progression of COVID-19 since changes in Provincial [testing eligibility](#) on December 31, 2021. However, Public Health continues to monitor the pandemic's progression using a variety of indicators (Attachment 1). Although monitoring indicators decreased from February 1, 2022, into mid-March, York Region has experienced increasing trends in recent weeks:

- **[Wastewater Surveillance](#)**: wastewater signals decreased following the peak from February to mid-March. The signal has been increasing from mid-March into April and remains elevated in the most recent data
- **Hospitalization and ICU admissions**: Hospital occupancy decreased from a peak in mid-January but has been steadily rising since mid-March following the removal of Province-wide public health measures. The numbers of COVID-19-related deaths in York Region have declined
- **Institutional outbreaks**: the number of institutional outbreaks has increased, with six in mid-March and 32 as of April 19, 2022

### **York Region Public Health is prioritizing case and outbreak management in highest-risk settings**

York Region continues to align with Ministry of Health guidance to support highest-risk settings with ongoing case, contact and outbreak management. These settings include long-term care, retirement and group homes, hospitals, hospices, shelters, farms and other congregate settings. In addition to providing support in outbreak management, collaboration between York Region Public Health, internal and community partners continues to:

- Ensure ongoing COVID-19 testing within shelters and group homes

- Identify new initiatives to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in populations at greatest risk
- Develop communications for family members of residents in institutional settings to increase vaccine uptake among residents
- Pilot Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) self-collection kits within York Region shelters

Additionally, Public Health continues to work with schools, childcare centres and day camps to facilitate messaging on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in schools. There have been 281 calls from March 1, 2022, to April 19, 2022, from schools and childcare settings seeking clarification on guidance or discussing absenteeism rates.

### **Promotion, administration and access to COVID-19 vaccines through community and mobile clinics across the Region remains a priority**

York Region Public Health appreciates the partnerships with local municipalities in the recent operation for mass immunization clinics. These clinics closed during the month of March and Public Health has now transitioned to smaller, community-based clinics within [five York Region offices](#). The new clinics are in the Towns of Georgina and Newmarket, and the Cities of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. In addition, a variety of mobile, pop-up and specialty vaccination clinics continue to be offered in settings such as:

- Elementary, secondary schools, churches, or other community locations
- Long-term care homes, retirement homes, or other congregate settings
- Recipients of homecare and others that have barriers (e.g., mobility) to attending clinics
- Clinics for those with anxiety and non-mRNA vaccine clinics (viral vector and protein-based vaccines)

### **York Region's vaccine coverage for individuals aged five and older continues to increase**

York Region vaccination rates continue to increase with over 88% of York Region residents having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and over 85% of residents having received two doses. As of February 18, 2022, third dose eligibility was expanded to youth aged 12 to 17, and the overall third dose coverage for residents aged 12 years of age and older has reached 57%.

### **The Province has continued to expand eligibility of COVID-19 vaccine**

On April 6, 2022 the Province expanded eligibility for fourth doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. On [April 7, 2022](#), York Region began offering fourth doses for eligible individuals aged 60 years and over, First Nation, Inuit and Métis individuals and their non-Indigenous household members aged 18 and older. The recommended interval to receive a fourth dose of the COVID-19

vaccine is at least five months (140 days) after receiving a third dose, but residents may elect to receive a fourth dose as early as three months (84 days) since their third dose. Fourth doses are available at York Region clinics by appointment, at [participating pharmacies](#) and through some primary care providers. As of April 19, 2022, 24,601 York Region residents have received a fourth dose. 22,719 of these are individuals aged 60 and older, and the remaining 1,882 are immunocompromised or belong to another eligible population group.

## **COVID-19 IPAC and outbreak preparedness assessments have been completed in all York Region congregate settings**

In 2021, all 29 long-term care homes, 41 retirement homes and 45 congregate-living settings (group homes with 10 or more residents), received on-site COVID-19 IPAC and outbreak preparedness assessments. As of April 14, 2022, the 177 congregate living settings with less than 10 residents will have received an on-site COVID-19 preparedness assessment or a COVID-19 outbreak inspection.

## **York Region Public Health continues to support schools, childcare centres, farms with international agricultural workers, recreational camps, and all congregate settings**

Infection control professionals continue to ensure the implementation of appropriate IPAC practices are followed in these settings. These facilities continue to be supported by IPAC measures when an outbreak has been declared (for any communicable disease) or high absenteeism has been identified, to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

## **Public Health will be completing a fall round of IPAC preparedness assessments for long-term care homes, retirement homes and large group homes**

In preparation for fall 2022 respiratory season (e.g., influenza, non-COVID-19 respiratory illnesses, COVID-19), the IPAC team will continue to work collaboratively with operators and local IPAC hubs to manage outbreaks, address public health concerns and ensure IPAC best practices are adopted in congregate settings. During the fall of 2022, Public Health will be completing another round of IPAC preparedness assessments with York Region's long-term care homes, retirement homes and larger congregate settings.

## **Since January 2022, the Province gradually began lifting public health COVID-19 measures under the *Reopening Ontario Act***

The Province announced a phased easing of public health measures in January 2022. The original Provincial timeline for rescinding pandemic control measures was accelerated, with the majority of COVID-19 related public health and workplace safety measures lifted on March 14, 2022. However, as part of normal Public Health operations, collaboration with Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers, the Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) and York Regional Police (YRP) continues.

On March 9, 2022, the Province announced a plan for [living and managing with COVID-19](#). This plan further lifted measures that included the ending of mandatory vaccination policies (March 14, 2022), most masking mandates (March 21, 2022), *Reopening Ontario Act* expiry (March 28, 2022) and the ending of all remaining measures, directives, and Provincial orders on April 27, 2022.

Although measures have been lifted, individual businesses and organizations may continue to keep COVID-19 measures in place. However, these measures are not enforced by York Region Public Health. York Region Public Health released messaging on April 5, 2022, strongly encouraging residents and schools to wear a mask when indoors, when in close contact with others, in crowds or in confined spaces. Further, on April 6, 2022, Public Health strongly recommended indoor mask wearing in all indoor settings, in alignment with 32 other health units from across the Province. York Region Public Health has partnered with York Region School boards to strongly recommend masking for students and staff.

Between February 6, 2022, and April 20, 2022, there were 765 inspections and 249 investigations that were related to COVID-19 and/or the *Reopening Ontario Act* followed up by Public Health. No charges were issued under the *Reopening Ontario Act* for non-compliance.

### **In March 2022, the Region submitted a business case for Provincial funding to support all incremental costs of the Public Health response to COVID-19**

As part of the Annual Service Plan submitted to the Ministry of Health for 2022, the estimated COVID-19 Extraordinary Costs are \$49.2 million (\$30.2 million for the COVID-19 Response and \$19 million for the COVID-19 Vaccine Program). The funding from the Ministry is expected to fully offset the increased cost for the COVID-19 Response in 2022, which will allow for no tax levy pressure to be incurred in 2022 because of COVID-19 Extraordinary Costs.

Throughout 2021 and early 2022, updated forecasts were provided to the Ministry of Health for Public Health Extraordinary Costs related to the COVID-19 Response and Vaccination programs. On March 31, 2022, the Ministry confirmed funding for 2021 of \$70.7 million for COVID-19 Extraordinary Costs, \$25.5 million for the COVID-19 Response and \$45.2 million for the COVID-19 Vaccine Program. This funding has fully offset the increased costs in 2021, ensuring there were no additional tax levy pressures.

### **Public Health is preparing for fall surges of respiratory illness, including COVID-19 and influenza (seasonal flu)**

The lifting of pandemic control measures and the return to pre-pandemic levels of interaction and activity has increased COVID-19 transmission, resulting in the increase of York Region cases, hospitalizations, and ICU admissions. As York Region moves through a sixth wave, preparations for a fall surge in respiratory illnesses, including both COVID-19 and influenza are underway.

## **York Region remains committed to responding to COVID-19, offering vaccinations and the gradual resumption of public health services**

Public Health continues to reinforce the importance of vaccinations and for all individuals to continue to follow public health advice including masking. Organizational changes have been put into place to ensure a sustainable COVID-19 response over time. A Public Health COVID-19 division is now fully operational and continues to oversee most aspects of the response previously handled by the Health Emergency Operations Centre. These changes allow for both an ongoing response and work to begin the restoration of important Public Health services that were reduced or paused during the pandemic, such as restarting Grade 7 vaccinations. Additionally, Public Health will use a health equity approach to assess the health of York Region due to the impacts of COVID-19 to inform the planning and resumption of essential Public Health services.



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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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for Dr. Barry Pakes  
Medical Officer of Health



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Bruce Macgregor  
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments (1)  
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