

YORK REGION PUBLIC HEALTH 2024 ACHIEVEMENTS



YORK REGION PUBLIC HEALTH

York Region Public Health (Public Health) is the third largest of 29 (previously 34) local public health units in Ontario. We serve York Region's nine municipalities with programs and services to prevent disease, promote health and improve wellbeing. Public Health is committed to improving the population health and supporting everyone to reach their full potential through:

- Health promotion and health protection strategies at a population level
- Empowering residents and partnering with communities to improve their health and wellbeing
- Preventive programs and services across the lifespan, from pre-conception to older adults

Public Health's mandate is achieved by delivering 36 programs and services through the following four divisions:

- Child and Family Health
- Healthy Living
- Healthy Protection
- Infectious Diseases and Control

The divisions are supported by foundational areas such as epidemiology and research, health equity and health promotion, which assess the health status of our population and ensure public health interventions are delivered in an equitable and evidence-informed manner. Public Health is situated as a Branch within the Community and Health Services Department.

Public Health is pleased to share several key achievements from 2024.

PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS WINS GOLD

Public Health is the proud recipient of a 2024 Gold MarCom Award acknowledging the [Public Health Matters E-Bulletin](#) for health care professionals. The MarCom Awards is an international creative competition recognizing outstanding achievement in marketing and communications.

Public Health Matters provides a critical connection between York Region Public Health and York Region's primary care community, reaching 1,000 readers each month. This e-bulletin provides timely and relevant public health guidance, updates and resources direct to York Region health care professionals' inboxes. Special editions and feature articles in 2024, written in collaboration with local physician guest authors, highlighted important health equity topics, such as Black health, providing gender-affirming care and treating patients experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.

By facilitating dialogue and the sharing of best practices and evidence between Public Health and primary health care partners, we are working together to create a more responsive and proactive approach to health and wellbeing for our community.



Public Health Matters team celebrates their 2024 Gold MarCom Award for excellence in marketing and communications





Our role is not just giving out medication or observing the reaction to the medication, it's also education. Our role also is to give them comfort, to build that trust. We give patients emotional support and help them improve their mental wellness. By building trust and security, [it] helps improve their mental well-being.

Susan Uy
Registered Practical Nurse



DESIGNATED AS A BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT ORGANIZATION

Public Health, as part of York Region's Community and Health Services Department, achieved Best Practice Spotlight Organization designation with the Northern York Region South Simcoe Ontario Health Team (OHT)!

This OHT is one of five in the Province to receive this prestigious designation sponsored by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. Achieving this designation reflects collaborative efforts across various branches within Community and Health Services, including Paramedics and Seniors Services, Public Health, Social Services, Integrated Business Services, and Strategies and Partnerships. This partnership and commitment successfully achieved the following:

- Implementation of best practices in Access York to provide relevant information and referrals to assist with service navigation
- Development of new tools to equip caregivers to navigate transitions in services, selfcare strategies and access to caregiver programs
- Provision of training and education for staff focused on harm and stigma reduction along with providing trauma informed services to better support clients who use substances

This designation showcases a strong commitment to providing quality care and ongoing dedication to implementing evidence-based practices.





HEALTHY SMILES? PUBLIC HEALTH IS ON IT!

The [Children and Youth Dental program](#) successfully conducted oral health screenings at 279 York Region elementary schools during the 2023-2024 school year! Close to 41,000 children and youth received screenings either in schools or at a Public Health dental clinic. During these screenings, the team took the time to support 2,299 families with system navigation and accessing restorative dental care.

Oral health is an integral part of overall health. The commitment and dedication of the Children and Youth Dental team plays a key role in the success of the program and in preventing long term oral health issues.

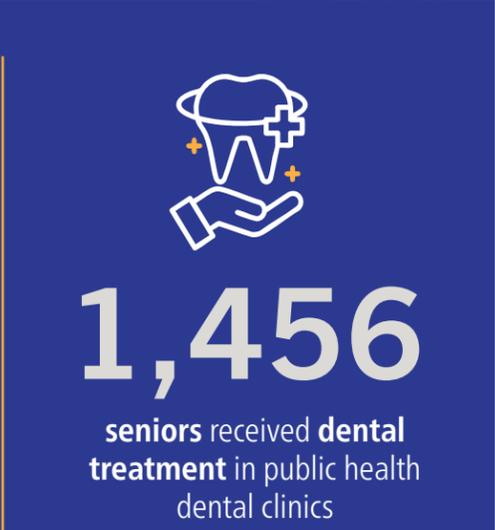
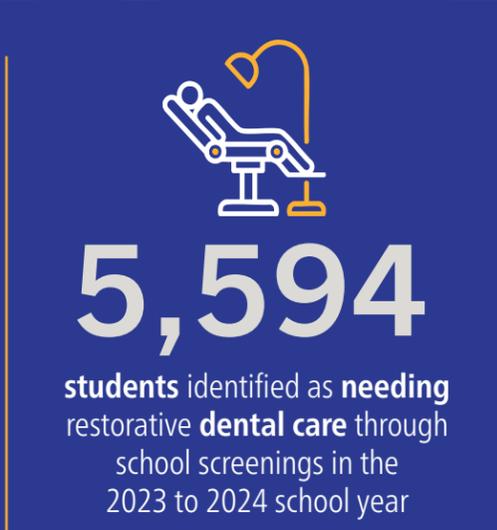
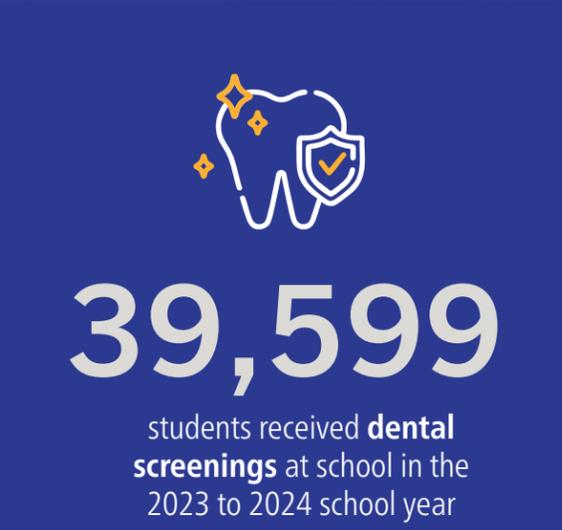
RIGHT CARE, RIGHT TIME!

Child and Family Health, in collaboration with partners and clients, successfully updated the [Perinatal Mental Health Pathway](#). This pathway was added to the York Region website to enhance access to a broad range of services from prevention through to treatment and crisis support.

The York Region Perinatal Mental Health Pathway is a comprehensive tool designed to help health care professionals refer York Region clients to appropriate mental health programs and services. It recognizes the diverse needs of clients, particularly when it comes to mental health in the perinatal period.

The pathway includes links to York Region Public Health programs, such as Transition to Parenting, a nine week Cognitive Behavioral Therapy group. This program has been shown to successfully reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety while improving parent-infant bonding. In addition, participants can further develop their Cognitive Behavioral Therapy skills through the Healthy Babies Healthy Children home visiting program. This program showcases skilled public health nurses bringing their expertise in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques to individualized home visits.

By providing access to a broad range of service options through this pathway, clients are more likely to receive the right care at the right time.



CHANGING LIVES: FOR A REASON, A SEASON AND A LIFETIME!

The saying “people come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime” rings true for Public Health staff and their impact on our residents!

For one York Region family, meeting with a Public Health nurse from Child and Family Health made a difference for a lifetime.

In 2024, a Public Health registered nurse completed an expert assessment of a child in a breastfeeding clinic and provided timely recommendation to the concerned mother, leading to a speedy follow-up with specialists. The assessment led to life-saving results for a child. Like many true heroes, the registered nurse humbly credits this success to being part of the amazing Healthy Growth and Development team, who provide a caring and supportive environment for families to address challenges with feeding their children. This team along with many others in Public Health, make a difference every day in many families’ lives.

2,349 breastfeeding clinic appointments for

1,388

unique clients including dietician consults



“PEOPLE COME INTO YOUR LIFE FOR A REASON, A SEASON OR A LIFETIME”





PROVIDING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR SENIORS

In alignment with York Region’s [Plan to Support Seniors](#), the Built Environment and Healthy Aging teams presented to the City of Richmond Hill’s Age-Friendly Community Council and the City of Vaughan’s Age-Friendly Advisory Committee. These presentations and engagement opportunities were aimed at fostering relationships and collaboration, highlighting how Public Health supports local municipal plans and recommendations and contributes to creating more inclusive, accessible and supportive environments for older adults.

23



municipal, regional and provincial policies and plans reviewed for Built Environment

Built Environment Specialists within Public Health support local municipalities to create walkable neighborhoods, accessible public transportation and safe recreational spaces where residents can live, work, play and thrive in a sustainable and equitable manner. These collaborations demonstrate the value and impact of working with multi-disciplinary partners with diverse backgrounds to support the growing aging population of York Region.



What makes me most proud about working with York Region Public Health for our Seniors Dental Program is clients have a restored confidence in their smile. Some of them haven’t had a cleaning in their whole lifetime. So we’re really able to bridge that gap and be able to provide access to care so that they can have confidence in their smile.

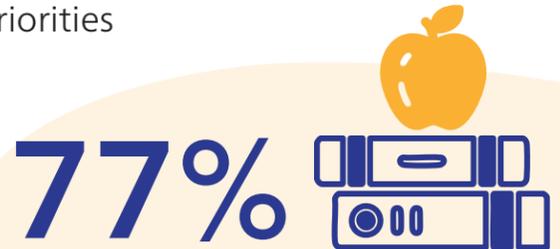
Meghan Mandville-Paul
Registered Dental Hygienist



PROMOTING HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Working collaboratively with community partners and school boards, the School Services Program has made strides in promoting mental health and wellbeing among York Region students. The team works closely with York Region school boards to identify top priorities and align strategies, messaging and resources for important health topics affecting children and youth, including mental health, physical activity and nutrition.

In 2024, the School Services Program led the Building Healthy Kids campaign to engage and build trust with parents, caregivers and students. The campaign aimed to promote the health of school aged children in York Region through education and timely information on relevant health topics including mental health. Overall, the campaign was a huge success seeing over 21,000 views to the campaign webpage which was in the top 10 trending campaign pages for 2024 on york.ca



of all elementary and secondary schools across all York Region school boards participated in the **School Services Program** and implemented comprehensive Healthy Schools Program initiatives



YOUTH VAPE FACTS CAMPAIGN A PROVINCIAL LEADER

In under a decade, vaping has become a significant public health concern for youth. Building on the 2022 and 2023 youth vaping campaigns targeting parents, the Healthy Living Vape Facts campaign directly targeted York Region youth aged 12 to 17 with the goal of raising their awareness of the health effects and harms of vaping. The campaign used innovative tactics to reach youth in digital and physical places where they spend time such as Snapchat and retail spaces.



tobacco and electronic cigarette vendor inspections

Campaign highlights include over seven million total impressions and 10,000 clicks to the [Vape Facts campaign webpage](#). Compared to pre-campaign baseline data, the post campaign evaluation saw a marked increase in youth awareness of the health effects and harms of vaping. For example, awareness that nicotine is highly addictive increased by 33.8%, and awareness of the potential mental health risks associated with vaping rose by 23.1%. School board community partners embraced the campaign messaging, and York Region's Vape Facts campaign was well-received across the Province, with numerous public health units within Ontario adapting the material.

INCLUSIVE SPACES FOR PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Healthy Living's Sexual Health Clinics (Clinics) program led an innovative campaign to promote our Clinics as welcoming, inclusive and affirming health care environments. Our Clinics offer a wide range of services such as testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, emergency contraception and preventive medicine for HIV. The campaign sought to reinforce that all clients, especially those identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ are welcomed and respected at our Clinics. The videos and campaign messaging aimed to reduce stigma related to sexual health and identity. Overall, the campaign garnered over one million impressions on social media and resulted in a significant increase in website views with a peak of 1,500 clicks in a single day. Clients and partners alike shared feedback on their love and appreciation of the campaign. Featuring York Region staff in the walkthrough video helped make visitors feel more comfortable as they saw familiar faces upon arriving at the Clinic for their appointment.

This work expanded into a successful Continuing Medical Education accredited webinar, Sexual Health Matters in York Region, for family physicians and other primary care professionals. The event was a success with 54 attendees, including 27 primary care physicians. Following the webinar, attendees expressed a renewed commitment to creating inclusive spaces for priority populations. Empowering health care professionals with the knowledge and skills to deliver inclusive care for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals is a step towards breaking the barriers of stigma and discrimination, fostering access to equitable health care and improved health outcomes.



13,962

client interactions on the sexual health information line

11,287

sexual health clinic appointments





I wouldn't be able to open the doors of this business if it wasn't for Public Health. They have to come in and make sure that you are ready to open your business. And in respect to support, I know that they are only a phone call away at any given time. And like I said, always there for us. It's a very positive relationship.

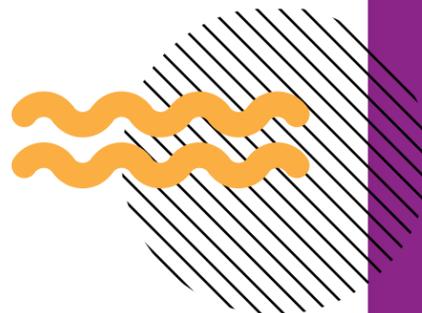
Rob Velenik
Owner of Sweet Dutchess Kitchen and Café



PROTECTING CHILDREN: FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION FOR HOME BASED CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Public Health and Social Services joined forces to support licensed home-based child care providers and agencies to become certified food handlers. Safe food handling practices are essential to protecting the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations. The certification program provides essential education on food safety, empowering child care providers to safely prepare, handle, and store food.

In 2024, Public Health and Social Services offered multiple opportunities for child care providers to become certified, including offering alternate language opportunities during both training and certification exams.



Through this process:

- 25 individuals were successfully certified through in-person sessions hosted by York Region Public Health
- 89 individuals were successfully certified through a Ministry approved Food Handler Certification [online course](#)
- Two agencies participated in a Ministry approved train the trainer model



1,341

infection prevention and control (IPAC) inspections in premises serving vulnerable residents such as long term care homes, congregate settings and child care centres



YOU MAKE THE FOOD. WE HELP YOU KEEP YOUR CUSTOMERS SAFE.

Health Protection's Food Safety team launched the second year of the [Food Operators campaign](#) in 2024. With a rise in home-based food businesses, this comprehensive promotional campaign increased awareness about the roles, responsibilities and requirements of all food operators in York Region. It also promoted Public Health as a supportive partner, helping food operators achieve their goals while keeping customers safe.

This campaign reached food businesses beyond the traditional restaurants, including home based food businesses, food trucks, and other online food operators in York Region. The campaign includes digital promotion and traditional channels like print material and media outreach.

Phase One of the campaign kicked off in 2023 and saw great success in connecting with this difficult-to-reach audience. Phase Two in 2024 expanded on the success by adding more digital resources, video components and translation of food operator resources into eight additional languages, helping operators access the information they need in a language with which they are most comfortable. Overall, the campaign resulted in a 225% increase from 2022 to 2024 of new home-based food operators connecting with Public Health.

21,568

food premise inspections



PROTECTING PEOPLE AND THEIR PETS

With an increase in rabies biting exposure incidents and the first human case of rabies in Ontario since 1967, Health Protection successfully offered two low cost and one no cost rabies clinics for pets in 2024. Working with local veterinary partners from the Community Veterinary Outreach Initiative, Health Protection hosted a no cost rabies clinic on Georgina Island for the Chippewas of Georgina Island to provide rabies vaccination and tick removals for pets. These clinics provide important rabies prevention information and assist pet owners who may not have the financial ability to vaccinate their pets.



1,803

animal exposure and rabies investigations

Health Protection and Healthy Living participated in the Community Veterinary Clinic initiative through Community Veterinary Outreach providing free of charge, preventative veterinary care (including rabies vaccination) for animals of residents experiencing homelessness, at high risk of homelessness, or vulnerably housed. Health Protection attended this clinic three times over the course of 2024 increasing awareness and access to these services for those in need.

441



rabies vaccine dispensed





INCREASING EFFICIENCY IN INFECTIOUS DISEASES CONTROL

The Infectious Diseases Control Division continued to digitize in 2024. The Control of Infectious Diseases and Tuberculosis teams have implemented technological efficiencies allowing for more timely and responsive client centered case and contact management despite increasing service demands. Infectious Diseases Control also continued to expand and enhance an integrated case and outbreak management tool. This tool allows for more efficient management of outbreaks in institutional settings; expansion of the tool to other diseases has created efficiencies in containing the spread of disease and alleviating workload pressures.

Public Health continues to be a leader provincially and nationally in infectious disease surveillance, analyzing and reporting data in a timely way to identify and respond to disease trends. In 2024, Infectious Diseases Control increased resident and partner access to near real time surveillance products. These products include the latest data and trends for diseases of public health significance, outbreak dashboards and an integrated respiratory dashboard (combining influenza, COVID-19 and RSV reportable data).

SUCCESSFULLY CONTAINED MEASLES CASE

Public Health did everything possible to protect resident health and prevent the spread of York Region’s first measles case since 2019. In February 2024, York Region Public Health investigated a confirmed case of measles with multiple exposure locations across York Region and over 2000 potential contacts. The response included working with case contacts, reviewing vaccination records and offering two post exposure vaccine clinics to protect potentially exposed vulnerable residents from acquiring measles. Public Health worked closely with many partners including school boards, primary care and hospital partners to make this response a success, preventing any subsequent cases.

Beyond this case, Public Health observed declining measles vaccine rates post pandemic; an alarming trend impacting overall population health and increasing the risk for measles transmission. To address this, 1,291 vaccine clinics were held in 2024 in many settings including, Public Health community clinics across York Region and within elementary and secondary schools.



3,373

sexual and blood-borne infections **investigations**



6,083

cases of diseases of public health significance **investigated** and

250

outbreaks managed to prevent transmission of critical public health threats



76,955

students assessed as part of the School Immunization Program



MISSION POSSIBLE: BOOSTING IMMUNIZATION COVERAGE!

Public Health has prioritized catch up efforts to address gaps in immunization coverage among York Region students that were created by disruptions during the pandemic. In 2024, Public Health's Vaccine Preventable Diseases team implemented an enhanced high school immunization clinic model leveraging our strong partnerships with York Region school boards, students, internal partners and our communities. These clinics allowed high school students who missed vaccines typically given during elementary years to receive multiple vaccines during the school day.

In this new model, 13,312 vaccine doses were given to students in one month, which is 860% more doses compared to a similar time frame in Public Health community clinics. Notably, there was a 6% increase in coverage for human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine amongst York Region high school students following these high school catch-up clinics. The HPV vaccine, which prevents many forms of cancers, is typically given in Grade 7; however many current high school students missed the opportunity to receive it during pandemic years.

Approximately **486,800** vaccine doses distributed to community health care providers and public health clinics



1,292

immunization clinics held and

103,524

vaccine doses administered by Public Health



Our successes with this campaign were shared at the 2024 Canadian Immunization Conference where many other health agencies from across Canada showed interest in learning and applying our approach in their jurisdiction.

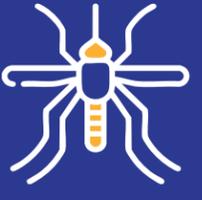
PROTECTING RESIDENTS THROUGH WASTEWATER SURVEILLANCE

With the unexpected end of the provincial wastewater surveillance program in Summer 2024, Public Health and York Region Public Works identified an opportunity to close a significant gap in early warning capacity for infectious diseases. This type of surveillance began during the COVID-19 pandemic and was a highly effective and cost-efficient way to conduct population level surveillance activities for emerging and circulating viruses and diseases. Public Health continues to use wastewater surveillance to test for circulating levels of influenza, COVID-19, RSV and now antimicrobial resistant organisms in health care settings.

This work would not be possible without the ongoing support of Public Works, funding from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Alliance Grant and University of Waterloo research partners. York Region Public Health is a leader in Ontario in this area of work and remains at the forefront of this early warning system protecting York Region residents.



OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

107,770 

street and environmentally sensitive catch basins treated with larvicide to prevent the spread of mosquitoes which carry West Nile disease

2,729

personal service setting inspections



27

Black legged ticks found. **10** confirmed with bacteria-causing Lyme disease in humans. **3** confirmed with parasite-causing Babesiosis



3,920

naloxone kits distributed to clients and 27 community partners

1,387



inspections of pools, splash pads, receiving basins, wading pools and spas

386 

inspections of small drinking water systems

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