



## **COVID-19 media briefing notes – Chair Karen Redman November 13, 2020**

### **Moving to orange**

Thanks for that update, and now that we've heard Dr. Emili report on our continual increase in cases and outbreaks in Waterloo Region, I want to be sure to emphasize that our numbers indicate we are moving into the orange level of response to COVID-19.

This is designated as the RESTRICT category. I have been in contact with Minister's Elliot office to stress our support for the province to move Waterloo Region into this level quickly and understand it will likely come into effect Monday, November 16, but we await confirmation from the Province on this.

Under the direction of Public Health, Regional Council is supportive of moving into this next level as a way to be more proactive rather than reactive to the increasing COVID-19 spread in our community.

The new category requires many of the same public health measures as before but with more restrictions at some businesses and limited gatherings.

As we learn more about these new measures and the changes required for Waterloo Region businesses, Regional Council as the Board of Health will work with Public Health and BEST Waterloo Region to get the information to businesses quickly.

If we want to slow down this surge, we must follow the measures of regular mask wearing, proper physical distancing, hand washing, staying home while sick and not letting our guard down when around family, friends or coworkers.



## **Pandemic Volunteers Needed**

When we were in the spring lockdown, the community came together to help neighbours, families and friends when needed.

Now the second wave of the pandemic is here but things have changed. Businesses and schools are open, which means people have returned to work and have less time for volunteering.

Waterloo Region's pandemic volunteer program has an urgent call for volunteers. They are looking for drivers and kitchen help to assist a number of organizations to ensure food deliveries can continue for people who are isolated due to COVID-19.

This program is an example of community partnership and kindness during the pandemic. It ensures all agencies, registered volunteers, and the people they serve as part of the response, are protected from COVID-19. Those interested in helping can visit [www.volunteerwr.ca](http://www.volunteerwr.ca).

## **New Testing Centre**

Earlier this week the Region and Grand River Hospital announced the use of the former Charles Street Transit Terminal downtown Kitchener as a drive-through testing site. This speaks to the great partnership that we have with Grand River Hospital.

It also speaks to finding tangible solutions through community partnerships. We are confident that this solution will help many residents throughout Waterloo Region access COVID-19 testing throughout the winter months.

The initial agreement is from November 9, 2020 to March 31, 2021 with an option to extend for a further 6 months.



They plan to use the bus lanes for queuing and testing, the passenger pods, catwalk and lunchroom as staff areas, and the ground floor lobby as a walk-in testing centre.

This “winterized” test site is anticipated to open in December.

## **Diwali**

This Saturday and Sunday is Diwali and Bhani Chor Divas, also known as the festival of lights. Diwali represents positivity and optimism, and celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, something we could all use right now. During this time of year, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist members of our communities celebrate by dressing up in formal clothes, lighting “diyas” around homes, praying, lighting off fireworks, exchanging gifts and having a festive meal.

This year, we’re asking the community to celebrate differently. Due to our current rate of COVID-19 spread, we’re asking anyone celebrating to please follow public health guidelines; this means practice social distancing, limit indoor and outdoor gatherings, and wearing masks.

I hope you are able to make a new tradition of celebrating with family and friends virtually and decorating your home with lights or diya (thee-ya). If going to the Mandir or Gurdwara is part of your tradition, we hope you can practice your prayers at home or join in virtual, live stream online prayers.

Just like all holidays so far this year, we all have to find different and safe ways to connect with loved ones and celebrate special days within the confines of our own homes.

We need everyone to step up and do their part to have no social gatherings, the situation is too precarious in our community right now.



## **Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group**

Lastly, I'd like to mention we announced the 11 community members of our Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group.

A selection committee of five BIPOC community leaders, suggested to the Region through public input, created the criteria and terms of reference for the advisory working group.

They chose 11 members from a group of over 70 passionate and qualified applicants. We are grateful to the selection team for taking such care to recruit skilled and experienced committee members and we are grateful to everyone who applied. The selection committee members will tell you they had a difficult job selecting the 11 members.

I'd also like to thank everyone who participated on our two town hall meetings where we heard from many racialized residents. It was their input that led to creating the Anti-Racism Working Advisory Group.

COVID-19 has amplified the inequities of BIPOC and our most vulnerable population. These members will play a significant role in helping eliminate systemic racism in our workplace and in the services the Region provides. They will provide recommendations, advice and information to Regional Council through an Anti-Racism Plan.

Thank you and back to Kerri.