



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

## **COVID-19 Update**

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Medical Officer of Health

August 18, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.

### **Overall Trends**

- We have seen a slight increase in the average number of new cases reported per week compared to when we experienced the lowest number of new cases per week.
- This is what we thought we might see with our community entering Stage 3, and increased numbers of people out and about.
- Overall, the status of COVID-19 remains relatively stable.
- As of this morning's dashboard update, there are 40 active cases.
- A total of 59,974 tests have been performed in Waterloo Region with positive results for approximately 2.4 per cent of all tests.
- There are currently no outbreaks declared in long-term care and retirement homes, other congregate care settings or workplaces.

### **New provincial data system**

- Earlier this summer, the Ministry of Health developed a new custom-built COVID-19 data system. This system will streamline processes for case and contact management as well as data reporting.
- Health units have been moving over to the new system throughout the summer and our scheduled migration was last week.
- The change impacted our publicly reported dashboard updates on Friday and Monday, because the infrastructure needed to be rebuilt to connect with the new data system.
- We are now using a slightly different definition for reporting cases. Previously we had reported all cases where we were the health unit responsible for case management.

- Moving forward, we will be reporting cases where we are the diagnosing health unit based on their primary address or the address on their health card, even though the case management may be completed by another health unit. This was done to align with the Province.
  - This has led to an overall increase of four cases.
- We have also performed a large data quality review during this transition phase.
- The ‘symptom onset date’ epi-curve has been renamed ‘episode date’ to align with the term used by Public Health Ontario.
- Other changes include switching to gender, rather than sex, as the new data system allows the client to report their gender, and you will notice that the cases by age group has been broken down further for under 20 and over 80. The new age groups are:
  - Nine and under
  - 10-19
  - 80-89
  - 90 and older

## Return to schools

- We are continuing to work closely with our local school board partners to support them implementing the Ministry of Education’s return to school plan.
- I appreciate that making the decision to return or not to in-class learning was not easy for many families.
- There is no wrong decision, only the decision that is best for your family.

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- We have learned that we will be funded to have approximately 20 new, public health nurses, as outlined in the Province’s plans. We expect recruitment to begin very shortly.
- These nurses will be involved in things like:
  - Assisting schools with infection prevention and control
  - Case and contact management
  - Outbreak management
  - And supporting the communication and engagement with parents and with our health care partners.

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- As with any place where people gather, we expect that we will have COVID-19 cases detected, but all the measures that the schools are diligently putting in place, will help **limit and control the spread** of COVID-19.
- These measures include:

- **Screening** for symptoms at home, for all staff and students, before they go to school, each and every day – if you have any symptoms, stay home.
- The prompt **isolation** of staff and students if they develop symptoms, including if symptoms develop while at school.
- **Physical distancing**, as much as possible.
- Increased **hand hygiene** for staff and students.
- **Enhanced cleaning** of high-touch surfaces
- **Cohorting** students into groups. This limits the number of staff and students your child has close contact with. Your child may be in more than one “cohort” but cohorts are still a useful measure because they help us to identify contacts and limit the spread of COVID-19 if a positive case is identified.
- **Face coverings** are required for students in grade 4 and up, but are strongly encouraged for all students.
- These measures are layered together to limit and control the spread of COVID-19 in school settings.

## Closing remarks

- Keeping schools open safely will be facilitated by low rates of community
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- We will be living in a pandemic situation for quite some time. But we will have the best chance of continuing to keep our society open if we make those public health practices a part of our daily lives and keep trying to do our best.
- Let's continue to:
  - Practice physical distance with anyone outside our social circle or bubble.
  - Wear a face covering in enclosed public places and on transit.
  - Wash our hands often.
  - Stay home and seek testing if we develop symptoms.
- Following these measures will help keep active cases in our community low and allow for economic recovery and re-opening to be maintained.
- Together we have and are making a difference.
- Thank you for your efforts.