COVID-19 Update

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Highlights

- COVID-19 cases are increasing locally and provincially.
- The latest provincial modeling projects that this trend will continue, and significantly strain Ontario’s health care capacity towards the end of Dec. and in January, even without accounting for the potential impact of Omicron.
- We need to act now, to increase vaccinations and reduce non-essential social contacts.
- (1) I am therefore strongly recommending that workplaces cancel or minimize the size of their in-person holiday parties or gatherings.
- (2) I am also strongly recommending that people minimize the size of their private, in-person gatherings.
- (3) And, finally, I am also recommending that workplaces begin preparations to enable work from home, where operationally feasible, as of the new year.
- It is important that we do what we can to keep our schools open, to keep our businesses open, to protect our residents, to preserve our health system capacity.
- That is why I am asking our residents to do what they can to scale back non-essential gatherings over the holiday season.
- Slowing the spread will buy us more time to build greater community immunity: to get more 5-11 year olds vaccinated and more 3rd doses in arms.
- We are so pleased to be able to offer children’s doses and 3rd doses to the most vulnerable now. We are excited to begin offering 3rd doses to those 50 years of age or older as soon as Monday. Please book your appointments as soon as possible.
Overall trends

- COVID-19 cases are increasing locally and across most of the province.
- As of yesterday, our 7-day average was 46 cases / 100,000 / week. Ontario’s was also 46 cases / 100,000 / week.
- Delta is still the dominant variant; however, we can expect the new Omicron variant will spread and that we will have cases in Waterloo Region.
- Our wastewater signal continues to slowly trend upward and mirror our case counts. Omicron has not been detected in the wastewater to date.
- As cases increase, we can expect outbreaks and hospitalizations to increase in the coming weeks.

School outbreak update

- We have seen a significant increase in the number of outbreaks and class dismissals in the elementary grades.
- We have also had to close two schools recently.
- In addition to these two schools, to whom we’ve offered rapid antigen screening tests, we will be offering rapid antigen screening tests to three more schools:
  - Sir Adam Beck in Baden
  - St. Vincent de Paul in Cambridge
  - St. John Paul II in Kitchener
- In addition, all students in all schools are in the process of receiving this week or next the rapid antigen screening tests provided by the Province for the holiday break.

Science Table update

- The Ontario Science Table’s update earlier this week informed us that:
- Increased COVID-19 hospitalizations and ICU occupancy is expected by the end of December (even without accounting for Omicron).
Graph above from the Science Table, December 7, 2021 Update.
Pressure on our ICUs will impact other patients due to staffing limitations.
To flatten the curve, we need to reduce transmission of the virus by increasing vaccination and following public health measures.
The Omicron situation is uncertain but the potential impact on the health care system could be substantial.
Vaccination continues to be highly effective:
  - Unvaccinated people have a 5-times higher risk of symptomatic COVID-19, a 13-times higher risk of being in the hospital, and a 23-times higher risk of being in the ICU.
The experience in other countries suggests we will need to boost immunity with third doses.
Vaccination and following public health measures can reduce the impact on our health care system.

Closing remarks
- I know that people have been planning and looking forward to family gatherings, and maybe getting together with work colleagues this holiday season.
- We all hoped this holiday season would be different but we cannot let up now.
- **The smaller the size of any gathering, the better.**
- We have the opportunity to act now to prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed, to maintain our gains, and to keep our businesses and schools open.

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• The best way to reduce the impact of Delta and Omicron is to get vaccinated and reduce non-essential social contacts.
• **Everyone who’s eligible for a 3rd should get one. The more immunity you have, the better you'll be protected against Delta and Omicron.**
• Stay safe – thank you.