



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
EMERGENCY SERVICES

COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Commissioner and Medical Officer of Health
Public Health and Emergency Services
December 18, 2020

Highlights

- The second wave is a significant threat to our community. Our health care system is under very heavy strain, and this is not sustainable.
- Update to map data improves accuracy.
- Mennonite communities are working to implement public health measures as required to reopen and rescind applicable Section 22 orders.
- We need to drastically reduce our social interactions.
- Local mental health supports are available.

Overall trends

- We have now been under Red-Control restrictions for 3.5 weeks.
- Case rates in Waterloo Region remain high, and we are at risk for further increases.
 - Our incidence rate, approximately 85 cases per 100,000 per week, is similar to our rate two weeks ago. Ontario's rate is 100 cases per 100,000 per week.
 - We are currently 8th in Ontario.
 - Our current per cent positivity (taking into account interim data) has not changed much recently and is currently 3.4 per cent.
 - Our reproductive rate has also remained relatively stable - recently between 0.8-1.1.
 - We are however seeing an increasing number of care homes going into outbreak, and we currently have two larger outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes where there is a high number of residents and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19.
 - As I mentioned Wednesday, we continue to see more hospitalizations and ICU admissions, and deaths. Large outbreaks in care homes also require greater supports from hospitals and other health system partners.

- Our health care system, like several others in Ontario right now, is under very heavy strain and the situation is not sustainable on an ongoing basis.

Dashboard update

- We have made updates to our methods for mapping cases by neighbourhood that you will see on this afternoon's dashboard update.
- The update to our methodology has improved the accuracy of assigning cases to neighbourhoods.
 - Previously we had used postal codes to map cases to specific areas.
 - One of the limitations with that method was that in rural communities, postal codes cover large areas and can cover more than one neighbourhood.
 - We are now using full addresses to match cases to neighbourhoods which is more accurate.
 - As of this morning, you will see a change in our map data with the most notable changes in rural neighbourhoods, in particular the villages of St. Jacobs, Wellesley Village and Ayr.
 - Our previous method did not have any cases assigned to them, so they appeared 'white' or non-reportable on the map.
 - A few urban areas were also affected but because they already had higher numbers, the effects are less visibly noticeable.
- The new method also reduces the number of cases for which we are unable to map because of invalid or missing postal codes.
 - Previously 178 cases (3.8 per cent) were unable to be mapped, that number has been reduced to 26 cases (0.5 per cent).

Update on Mennonite Communities

- On December 2, due to the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19, I issued Section 22 Orders across certain Mennonite communities in Waterloo Region (Old Order, Markham, Old Colony, and David Martin Mennonite communities) to their affiliated parochial schools and places of worship.
- The communities have been working with us to implement public health measures in both their parochial schools and places of worship that would enable us to lift the Section 22 order for those settings.
- As we receive written affirmation that the required measures have been implemented for each parochial school or place of worship, I am rescinding the applicable Section 22 order on a setting by setting basis.
- As such, we anticipate that, should the Province permit places of worship and schools in general to be open, some churches will start reopening this Sunday and some parochial schools will start reopening next week, in keeping with the rest of our community.
- I want to thank community leaders and members, as well as our partner agencies and Public Health staff, who have worked together to slow the spread of COVID-19 in these communities.

Closing remarks

- Our situation is serious and the second wave is a significant threat to our community.
- I am asking our residents to **drastically reduce social interactions**
- I recognize that may present hardships and many may be feeling isolated
- Your mental health is important.
- If you or someone you know needs help, local mental health support is available at 1-844-437-3247 or visit [here247.ca](https://www.here247.ca)
- While we must stay apart throughout the holiday season, we can connect and support each other, in spite of the distance
- There are challenges ahead of us but there is hope too
- Waterloo Region is a caring and resilient community, and we will get through this together.
- Thank you.