



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
February 26, 2021

Highlights

- Our indicators are no longer improving.
- Our case and contact management team has also noted an increase in social gatherings.
- The percentage of our new cases that are variants has increased, similar to provincial trends.
- Public health measures work against variants of concern, but we have to be more vigilant than ever before. We cannot let up on our measures.
- Continuing to practice public health measures – limiting contact with others and staying home as much as possible – is imperative to control the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.

Overall trends

- Our indicators are no longer improving.
 - Although I don't know yet what our daily new number of cases will be today, our team has noticed a growing number of cases in the last three days.
- Our weekly incidence rate is currently between 50-55 cases per week per 100,000 residents.
 - This is up slightly from last week where we were between 45-50 cases per week per 100,000 residents.
- We are currently managing 357 active cases and 21 outbreaks.
 - Though outbreaks have decreased, the number of settings we are currently monitoring for outbreaks has increased over the last week.
- Taking into account interim data, our latest per cent positivity is currently at 2.5 per cent.
- Our latest reproductive rate currently sits at 1.0, and it will increase if our daily numbers increase.
- I am becoming concerned. We will have to watch our indicators closely.

Variants of concern

- Earlier this week we added the variants of concern to our dashboard under the epi-curves tab.
- We continue to see a rise in variant cases, which is not unexpected.
 - Public Health Ontario is screening all positive cases of COVID-19 for variants and, as projected by provincial modelling, the percentage of cases which are variants has been increasing, at a pace similar to that of Ontario.
- To date a **total of 67 variant cases** have been identified in Waterloo Region
 - Of the 67 total variant cases, seven have now been confirmed as the B.1.1.7 variant and 60 have screened positive and are awaiting confirmation of a specific variant of concern at this time.
- We are also seeing outbreaks now connected to variant cases. Again, this is not unexpected because outbreaks are a reflection of what we see in the community.
 - When there are more cases, there are more outbreaks.
 - As more variant cases are identified, outbreaks connected to variants will become more common.
- As mentioned earlier, we have implemented enhanced case and contact management for each and every case of COVID-19, treating every single case as though it may be variant.

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- I appreciate that people are feeling concerned about variant cases. Public health measures work against variants of concern, but we have to be more vigilant than ever before.
- COVID-19, especially variants, can spread easily when people have close, unprotected contact, such as without physical distancing or face coverings, and in enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces or crowded places.
- This is why we continue to recommend that you:
 - Avoid social gatherings with those outside your immediate household
 - Limit non-essential trips outside your home
 - Practice physical distancing
 - Wear a face covering that fits snugly
 - Wash your hands often with warm water and soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
 - Avoid enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces and crowded places
 - Stay home when you are sick, isolate from household members and schedule an appointment for testing

Closing remarks

- I am concerned about the possibility that our case rates may be starting to move in the wrong direction.
- When more people are having close contact with others, we expect to see cases begin to increase again.
- We are hearing through case and contact management that people are increasing their social contacts again, and gathering with more people outside of their households.
- I know it's been a long road. And it's been hard to not be with friends and family.
- But we are in an extremely precarious time.
- In order to have the best chances of keeping our schools open and not reverting back to more significant restrictions, it is critical that we all limit our close contact with others and stay at home, to the extent possible, to limit the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.