COVID-19 Update

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Highlights

- Ontario and Waterloo Region continue to experience widespread community transmission of Omicron.
- Commensurate with the spread, there are many outbreaks in hospitals, long-term care and other high-risk congregate care settings.
- Our local hospitals will have a further update for us today.
- Our wastewater signals continue to be at their highest levels, although there may be early indications of the signal starting to plateau at these very high levels.
- The Ministry of Education confirmed that students will be returning to in-class learning on Monday, with enhanced measures to reduce the risk of transmission within schools.

Overall trends

- Ontario and Waterloo Region continue to experience widespread community transmission of Omicron.
- It is projected this will continue for the month of January.
- Commensurate with the spread, as of yesterday, we had 32 outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes; 26 outbreaks in other congregate settings; and six outbreaks in local hospitals.
- Local hospitals continue to be under very significant strain. Our local hospitals will have a further update for us today.
- Regarding our wastewater surveillance, based on data up to January 10, 2022, the signal remained extremely high at all sites. In Waterloo, the wastewater
signal continued to increase but there may be indications of the signal starting to plateau in Kitchener and Cambridge.

- A reminder however that impacts to our health care system lag a few weeks behind on increase or decrease in cases. So, we should not expect impacts to our health care system to ease until a few weeks after infection decreases.

**School update**

- On Wednesday, the Province announced students will be returning to in-person learning on Monday, January 17, with further enhancement of measures to reduce the risk of transmission within schools.
- The Ontario Science Table has also released an overview of the science regarding schools. Their key take-aways include:
  - (1) Evidence shows that school closures are associated with substantial mental health and educational attainment harms. These risks are cumulative and are disproportionately experienced among families from marginalized groups.
  - (2) Emerging evidence suggests Ontarians aged 5-19 years appear to be at low risk of hospitalization and severe disease from Omicron, compared to other ages. Hospitalization risk is further reduced by vaccination.
  - (3) Evidence suggests that closures of in-person learning has a smaller effect on community spread of SARS-CoV-2 compared to many other public health measures.
  - (4) Vaccination, ventilation and filtration, cohorting, testing, staying home when sick and high-quality masks mitigate the risks of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in schools.

**Closing remarks**

- Vaccinations continue to provide powerful protection against severe illness from COVID-19. This is why residents should not delay getting a first, second, or third dose.
- It is particularly important to receive your booster dose if you are over 50, immune-compromised, or pregnant.
- Public health precautions continue to be an important tool to help slow the spread, and help our hospital and other critical and essential services to continue. Please continue to:
  - Limit your non-essential contacts;
- Optimize the fit and filtration of your mask, and wear it when around those outside your household; and
- Avoid poorly ventilated places and crowded spaces.
- Thank you for doing your part to protect yourself and your loved ones from COVID-19.
- Despite the current challenges we are experiencing, the actions of our community are making a difference, and will help us in the days to come.
- Thank-you.