COVID-19 Update

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Highlights

- Our hospitals and high-risk settings (e.g., long-term care, retirement homes and congregate settings) remain under tremendous pressure. Our hospitals are facing their most challenging times yet.
- Our wastewater signals are still at their highest levels; however, recently these levels have started to plateau.
- Our collective efforts to blunt the Omicron wave are showing promise but we cannot let up on the brake pedal too quickly.
- With the anticipated loosening of some restrictions in Ontario beginning on January 31, we all need to move forward cautiously to protect our progress and avoid going backwards.

Overall trends

- Omicron spreads easily, and even though it is milder than Delta, due to the high number of cases, there is a record number of people requiring hospital care.
- As case counts cannot be relied on to monitor trends due to limited testing, we are relying on signals from proxy indicators such as wastewater signals, percent positivity of tests, and the evolution of outbreaks in hospitals and high-risk settings to monitor trends.
- Although there are signs that Omicron is plateauing, it is plateauing at very high levels.
• The wastewater data up to January 18 indicates that the signal for COVID-19 remains very high, but the rapid increase has plateaued at our Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo sites.
• The number of outbreaks in our high-risk settings remains very high.
• As of yesterday (Thursday), we had 39 outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes, and an additional 27 outbreaks in other congregate living settings. We also had 9 outbreaks in our local hospitals.
• Our hospitals are facing their most challenging times yet.
• Grand River Hospital confirmed yesterday that it is at the point where patients may need to be transferred out of the hospital for care. Many hospitals across the province are in a similar situation.
• In general, hospitals have seen a greater proportion of unvaccinated individuals among those who have been admitted for COVID-related illness and those who have arrived with COVID along with their primary medical issue.
• Hospitals will provide another update later today.

Prevention remains key
• Yesterday, the Province released plans to gradually loosen public health measures in step-wise manner, starting on January 31, 2022.
• These steps would occur as long as public health and health system indicators head in the right direction. Specifically, they are monitoring indicators such as:
  o Declining per cent positivity
  o Declining number of outbreaks in high-risk settings
  o Plateauing or decreasing hospital and ICU admissions
• Currently, COVID-19 is still highly prevalent in the community.
• Although there is some indication that we may be reaching a plateau, prevention remains key.
• We need to continue to exert caution. We need to continue to:
  o Limit our non-essential contacts
  o Optimize the fit and filtration of our masks, and wear it when around those outside of our households
  o Avoid poorly ventilated places and crowded spaces
  o Stay at home when we’re sick
• Residents should also make it a priority to get their first, second, or third dose.
• And if you are over 50, immune-compromised or pregnant, please get a booster dose as soon you can.

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Closing remarks

- Continuing to follow public health measures and increasing our community immunity will allow us to keep schools open, begin to loosen restrictions in a step-wise manner as planned, and allow hospitals to resume cancelled procedures and surgeries as soon as they’re able to.
- Thank you all for doing your part. Our individual efforts will help those around us, and our collective efforts will help our community get through this.