COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Medical Officer of Health
Public Health and Emergency Services
January 28, 2022

Highlights

- Our local hospitals continue to be under very high levels of strain.
- Those who are unvaccinated continue to be at greatest risk of hospitalization and serious outcomes including death.
- We are seeing signs of a plateau in the surge of Omicron cases.
- We still need to be cautious in the coming weeks.
- Our collective efforts to increase vaccination rates and follow public health precautions are working.
- We are getting through this together, and we will get through this together.

Overall trends

- The wastewater data up to January 24, 2022 indicates that the COVID-19 signal is now starting to decline at all sites. The wastewater signal still remains high however relative to previous waves, and continues to be dominated by the Omicron variant.
- The percent positivity of COVID-19 tests is slowly declining. The most recent 7-day average is at 18 per cent, similar to Ontario’s rate.
- Hospitals in Waterloo Region continue to be under very high levels of strain at this time and will provide another update later today.
- The number of outbreaks in our high-risk settings remains very high although their number has stabilized.
• Unfortunately, due to the extent at which Omicron has spread, we are now seeing a growing number of reported deaths in our community. Death is the most delayed indicator of previous spread.
• For the 30-day period between December 24 to January 23, we reported 26 deaths:
  o Age Range: 51-99 (median age: 86)
  o Sex: 15 females / 11 males
  o 65 per cent of deaths were in the 80+ age group
  o 12 deaths are associated with long-term care or retirement homes
  o 73 per cent of deaths were vaccinated with two or more doses
    • While the risk of serious outcomes and deaths remains greatest among the unvaccinated, a majority of deaths recorded will be among the vaccinated, as a large majority of the population have had two or more doses, especially those in the older age groups
    • The oldest age groups are also at greatest risk of severe outcomes including death
  o 62 per cent of deaths listed COVID-19 as the underlying cause
• Sadly, we have lost many of our loved ones to this pandemic. I would like to express my deepest sympathy to everyone who has lost a family member or friend to COVID-19.

Cautious approach to reopening
• The Province will begin to loosen restrictions on January 31.
• Social gathering limits will increase on Monday to 10 indoors and 25 outdoors, and allow 50 per cent capacity for most indoor public settings and spectator events.
• Reopening cautiously, in a step-wise manner, will help protect our health care system, keep our schools open, and help us move forward.
• For the coming weeks, I strongly advise residents to continue to be cautious
  o Limit your non-essential contacts
  o Optimize the fit and filtration of your mask, and wear it when around those outside our household
  o Avoid poorly ventilated places and crowded spaces, and
  o Stay home if you are sick
• Prevention is the best approach: if you are not fully immunized, please get your first, second or third dose now to protect yourself and your loved ones.
Closing remarks

• We need to continue our efforts to blunt the severity of the Omicron variant so the province can safely and gradually reopen.
• Through the efforts of our community, we are getting through this together, and we will get through this together.
• Thank you for all that you’re doing.