



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
January 29, 2021

Highlights

- Trends are moving in the right direction but are still comparatively high to what we have seen in the spring and early fall.
- The UK variant has been detected in Waterloo Region. This is not unexpected. There have been over 50 cases detected in Ontario in multiple other health unit areas.
- It is important to maintain social connections, while we are apart.

Overall trends

- We continue to see new cases slow and move in the right direction but numbers are still comparatively high to what we have previously seen in the spring and early fall.
- Our incidence rate continues to decrease and is now at approximately 89 cases per 100,000 per week.
- We are currently managing 620 active cases and 37 outbreaks.
- Taking into account interim data, our latest per cent positivity has also begun to decrease and is currently at 4.2 per cent
- Our latest reproductive rate remains at 0.8.
- Hospitalizations and ICU admissions remain high.
 - This is not unexpected, as hospitalizations, the need for ICU care and sadly, deaths, are all lagging indicators.
 - These will continue to be higher in the initial weeks following high case rates.

UK Variant

- We were informed last night, by Public Health Ontario, that a case of the UK variant has been detected in Waterloo Region.
- This is not unexpected. There have been over 50 cases detected in Ontario in multiple other health unit areas.

- I expect more cases will be detected in Waterloo Region, as more testing for the variant by the provincial lab system is done in the days ahead.
- The individual, whose illness has resolved, is a female in her 30s. We are completing a further detailed investigation of the case and her contacts with respect to the UK variant and will share more information in the coming days.
- What this means for Waterloo Region is that we must not let up our guard with respect to public health measures.
- What we have been doing are the same measures we need to employ against this variant.
- Provincial modelling experts indicate with the current spread of the variant across Ontario, it is likely it will become the dominant strain by March.
- But based on experience from other jurisdictions, spread can be slowed and case rates can still be reduced when we continue to practice public health measures.
 - Avoid social gatherings with those outside your immediate household
 - Limit non-essential trips outside your home
 - Practice physical distancing
 - Wear a face covering
 - Wash your hands often
 - Avoid enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces and crowded places
 - Stay home when you are sick.
- If you develop any symptoms, isolate from household members and schedule an appointment for testing.

Mental health support

- It is important to maintain social connections, while we are apart.
- Connecting with others and developing positive relationships has a significant influence on our mental health and wellbeing.
- I appreciate that feeling connected is challenged by public health measures but while we stay apart, we do not have to be alone.
- Try new ways to stay connected with friends and family:
 - Schedule time to connect virtually, plan regular check-ins each week
 - Have dinner with friends over a video call
 - Stream an online group fitness class
 - Attend a virtual book club
 - Have an online movie night
- It is important to stay connected and talk with the people you trust about how you are feeling.
- If you're struggling, local help is available at [here247.ca](https://www.here247.ca)

Closing remarks

- I want to acknowledge all the efforts that the vast majority of Waterloo Region residents have taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.
- Our actions matter and they are making a difference.

- By following the provincial requirements and practicing public health measures, we protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our community.
- It bears repeating, that we can unknowingly transmit COVID-19 to others, before we develop symptoms.
- With the more transmissible UK variant present in Ontario and Waterloo Region, it is vital that we continue to do what is recommended at this time, which is to limit our close contacts, stay at home, and only leave for essential reasons.
- These measures are not easy, but they are effective.
- When we limit our close contacts, we slow the spread of COVID-19.
- Our challenge isn't over, but our actions matter, and our work together will lead to better days ahead.
- Let's keep going.
- Thank you.