



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
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Highlights

- We are experiencing an acceleration in the spread of COVID-19 in our community following the holiday season.
- As community spread increases, there will be an increase in the number of employees who acquire COVID-19 and the risk for workplace outbreaks. Public Health precautions for workplaces need to be applied consistently across the workplace. In particular, between employees and in employee-only areas where most spread has occurred to date.
- In addition to the Provincial Shutdown measures, all Waterloo Residents need to avoid social gatherings and only go out for essential purposes.

Overall trends

- We continue to see high numbers of new cases every day, with multiple outbreaks in workplaces and congregate care settings being declared daily, and continual hospitalizations, ICU admissions and, sadly, deaths.
- Our incidence rate is at its highest to date.
 - It is now at approximately 160 cases per 100,000 per week.
 - Up from 92 cases per 100,000 per week in late December.
- Taking into account interim data, our latest per cent positivity has increased to 5.5 per cent.
- Our latest reproductive rate has increased to 1.3.
- These indicators show that we are experiencing an acceleration in the spread of COVID-19 in our community following the holiday season.

Workplace outbreaks

- As community spread increases, we expect to see an associated increase in the number of employees who acquire COVID-19 and the number of outbreaks declared in workplace settings.
- In the second wave, workplaces have become among the most frequent settings experiencing outbreaks in Ontario and it is the same situation in Waterloo Region
- We currently have 13 active workplace outbreaks and there are a total of 135 workplaces with at least one worker who has tested positive.
- An outbreak is declared when there have been two or more confirmed cases in a workplace setting with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection within the workplace setting.
- For each workplace outbreak, we work closely with the workplace to ensure appropriate infection prevention and control practices are in place and that they have the necessary support.
- This includes identification and notification of all high risk contacts. These contacts are advised of their requirement to self-isolate and seek testing.
- Our principle for disclosing the name of a workplace or setting is to do so when we are unable to identify and provide direction to the high risk contacts and to do so in a timely manner.
- Workplace outbreaks have increased significantly during the second wave. Eighty-five per cent of all workplace outbreaks in Waterloo Region have been declared in November and December 2020.
- Our investigations have observed that public health measures are generally well-practiced during interactions between employees and members of the public but lapses are observed between employees or, to a lesser extent, between patrons. Such as:
 - Employees carpooling together
 - Coming to work while symptomatic
 - Not maintaining physical distancing/ masking in employee-only areas, such as in lunch rooms/break rooms and meeting rooms
 - Participants on a team sport not keeping a distance/ masking
- I am thankful for Council's support and their motion to advocate to both the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada on the need for paid sick time to help address the ongoing spread of COVID-19.

Closing remarks

- There has been a resurgence of cases following the holidays, provincially as well as locally.
- I want to be clear, this is not an indication that the measures are not needed, it is an indication that we can't rely on them alone.
- Without a Provincial Shutdown, case rates and spread would have been even higher.
- We are approaching the two-week mark of the shutdown.

- Until that point, our case rates are reflective of the interactions people have had two weeks prior.
- In addition to the Provincial Shutdown measures, all Waterloo Residents need to avoid social gatherings, only gather with those in our household (or one other exclusive household if we live alone) and only go out for essential purposes.
- It will be important to assess the impact of the shutdown measures as well as our own actions in the coming weeks.
- It has been a difficult week but there is still hope.
- We were able to flatten the curve in the spring, by following public health measures and limiting our interactions with others.
- We can do it again.
- We all have a role to play to protect ourselves, our family, loved ones, and our community.
- By working together, we can succeed in flattening the curve once more.
- Thank-you.