COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Commissioner and Medical Officer of Health
Public Health and Emergency Services
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Highlights

- Indicators remain high but relatively stable.
- Large cluster of confirmed cases identified
- We all must continue to limit our mobility, limit our close contacts, and avoid social gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Overall trends

- Our incidence rate of COVID-19 in Waterloo Region is relatively stable at this time.
- The incidence rate is holding at approximately 45 cases per 100,000 per week.
- We are currently managing 313 active cases and 14 active outbreaks.
- Taking into account interim data, our latest per cent positivity is currently at 2.1 per cent.
- Our latest reproductive rate is currently at 0.8, which is under 1.
- However, week-over-week improvements have slowed since mid-February.
- Over the last month more than 1,200 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Waterloo Region.
- While I am grateful that our cases remain stable at this time, I am concerned with what I am seeing in other communities across Ontario where case rates have gone up again, and the impact variants can have on transmission rates.

Cluster

- Earlier this week, our case and contact management team identified a cluster of confirmed cases related to multiple social gatherings that were held at three private residences between Thursday, March 4 and Sunday, March 7.
- This is an example of how easily it can spread. COVID-19 continues to circulate in our community and residents are asked to avoid all social gatherings.
- At this time, there are 23 confirmed cases and one probable case connected to this cluster and 20 close contacts.
We have also learned that one of the initial cases has now screened positive for a variant of concern. The specific variant has not been identified yet.
  - It is expected that the other cases will also screen positive for a variant.
  - With COVID-19 you can be infectious before you develop symptoms and before you know you have it.
  - It spreads easily between loved ones and friends, those with whom we may feel comfortable with and around whom we can let our guard down.

Variants of concern

- To date, a total of 245 variant cases have been identified in Waterloo Region.
- Of that total, 17 cases have been confirmed for the B.1.1.7 variant.
- And the remaining 228 cases have screened positive for, and are awaiting confirmation of, a specific variant of concern.
- In Ontario, more than 11,000 variant cases have been detected, with 1,200 confirmed for one of the variants of concerns.
- We know that public health measures are effective against variants of concern – we have seen many situations in which a variant did not spread – but they must be practiced. If they are not practiced, they will spread more easily.
- We are in a risky period at this time. The variants will spread easily if we let them.
- This is why I continue to advise all residents to avoid all social gatherings, limit close contacts and stay home as much as possible.

Closing remarks

- Communities in Ontario are seeing case rates rise.
- Our actions today inform what comes next for Waterloo Region.
- A bright future lays ahead of us, but we must not lose sight of what we need to do to get there.
- Our situation is precarious and we are not immune to a rapid acceleration of cases.
- We all must continue to limit our mobility, limit our close contacts, and avoid social gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.
- Following public health measures is critical in our ability to delay or control the severity of third wave for Waterloo Region.
- Thank you.