COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Acting Medical Officer of Health

March 27, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.

Room 110, Regional Headquarters, 150 Frederick Street, Kitchener

Update on cases

- In total, we have 69 cases in Waterloo Region as of 10:30 a.m. this morning.
    - Of the 69 cases, 33 are confirmed positive and 36 are presumptive positive.
        - A presumptive positive case is one that is very likely to receive laboratory confirmation in subsequent days.
    - Of that total, 11 cases are currently in hospital.
    - The total number we have tested in Waterloo Region is 1,463
    - Of that number, 901 have been confirmed negative.
    - We are awaiting test results on 493 individuals.
    - Public Health is monitoring 562 individuals.
    - One case is now resolved.
- With these increasing numbers, I want to remind residents that we should consider that we have community transmission of COVID-19 throughout our region.

Ministry of Health updated guidance on resolved cases

- The Ministry of Health has provided updated guidance regarding when someone can be considered resolved.
    - For individuals self-isolating at home (and provided that the individual no longer has a fever and symptoms are improving):
        - They can stop self-isolating 14 days following symptom onset.
        - This applies to individuals whether they were confirmed by testing, as well as individuals who were not tested but have symptoms compatible with COVID-19.

o   For hospitalized patients and health care workers, there will still need to be 2 negative tests, at least 24 hours apart, for them to be considered resolved.

Recommendations for faith communities and churches, and other gatherings

- On March 17, in order to slow the spread of COVID-19, I requested the closure of all church and other faith settings, among other settings.
- Many faith communities and churches in Waterloo Region have suspended physical gatherings.
- I sincerely appreciate their collaboration.
- For those faith communities and churches which are still allow large gatherings – even if they do not technically surpass the 50-person threshold as set out in the current Provincial order – I urge you to please suspend all in-person gatherings, and explore virtual options to continue supporting members of your communities.

For **all groups** who are still currently holding gatherings:

- Given the community transmission of COVID-19 that is now occurring in Waterloo Region, and the Region's and area municipalities' declarations of states of emergency on Wednesday of this week, it is more important than ever that we:
  - o   Do what we can to encourage and enable our residents to stay at home when they do not need to be out, and
  - o   To practice physical distancing whenever they are out.
- For people invited to gatherings, please do not attend.

Defining self isolation, social distancing and self monitoring

- There's a lot of new terminology and a lot of new language around COVID-19 and sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish one term from another.
- Three new terms that are used quite often when talking about COVID-19 are
  - o   Self isolation
  - o   Social distancing (or physical distancing)
  - o   And self monitoring
- Each of these practices helps slow the spread of the virus in Waterloo Region

Self-isolation

- Self-isolation is for people who have symptoms – such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing or even mild symptoms

- Self-isolation is also for anyone who has returned from travel outside of Canada
- Self-isolation includes:
  - Staying at home
  - Having food brought to you
  - Limiting the number of visitors in your home
  - Avoiding contact with others, including others in your home
  - Using a separate bedroom and bathroom, if possible. If a separate bathroom is not an option, clean all surfaces with a disinfectant after use

Self monitoring

- We used to advise people whom we considered to be at low risk of exposure to a known case of COVID-19 to self-monitor for symptoms
- That is, monitor themselves for the development of symptoms
- Now that COVID-19 can be considered to be present anywhere in the region, people should in general self-monitor or pay attention to how they're feeling.
- And if they start to feel ill, they should distance themselves from others, and go home and self-isolate, as soon as they can.
- Many illnesses will not turn out to be COVID-19. We still have plenty of cases of flu and other respiratory viruses at the moment.
- But the risk of acquiring COVID-19 in our community is increasing, and it doesn't matter what infection you may have. You should self-isolate when you start to develop symptoms to prevent transmission to others.

Social or physical distancing

- I will start using the term 'physical distancing', because it better reflects what we want to accomplish, and we do not want people to feel isolated, even when they are physically apart.
- We want people to still be able to connect with others, such as through phone or video chat. But we want them to physically distance themselves from others.
- We encourage **all** residents to practice physical distancing.
- Physical distancing involves taking steps to limit the number of people you come into close contact with.
- Physical distancing includes taking important measures such as:
  - Working from home where possible.
  - Avoiding non-essential trips in the community.
  - Avoiding gatherings.
  - Planning virtual meetings instead of in person.
  - Maintaining a distance of 2 metres or two arms' length between yourself and others.

Conclusion

- Thank you to all of our residents who continue to take steps to help protect the health our community.
- These are challenging and rapidly changing times for our community, but we are in this together.
- Together we can, and will, make a difference.