



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

## COVID-19 Update

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

May 15, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.

### Overall Trends

- This morning you may have noticed a change in the epi-curves on our dashboard.
- They now reflect cases related to an outbreak – whether in a congregate living setting such as a long term care home, retirement home or group home, as well as other outbreaks – and community cases.
- Community cases are those not associated with a specific outbreak where the transmission may be close contact with another case, from travel, or an unknown source.

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- We are one of the health units that tracks and reports testing numbers on our public dashboard.
- Our numbers are provided by multiple sources, including our testing partners and from long-term care homes and retirement homes. This takes time and effort to put together.
- Since we first released our dashboard we have been engaged in data quality checks.
- With the multiple sources we wanted to be careful we would not double count the number of tests that have been done.
- In the end, we ended up undercounting the total number of tests that have been done.
- As part of this data reconciliation, we expect a significant rise in the total number of tests completed, as of Saturday morning's dashboard refresh. We estimate the total number will increase by roughly **3000**.

## Testing

- Other past few weeks we have been working with our clinical testing partners to be ready to expand testing in our community.
- On behalf of the testing partners, I am pleased to announce that, **beginning today**, as per Provincial guidance, **all residents with symptoms will be eligible for testing**
- We have completed “whole home” testing of all long-term care facilities
- Completing this one-time, ‘whole home’ testing means that we now have capacity to test more residents.
- The Province has also worked hard to expand testing capacity across Ontario and improve the overall lab system. They have indicated to us they have the capacity.

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- These are 5 assessment centres in the Region: 3 located at the area hospitals and 2 community assessment centres
  - All take referrals from primary care physicians and there will be self-referral options for St. Mary’s and Grand River’s centres soon
  - Information on their locations, hours of operation, etc. will be available very shortly on our updated webpage regarding the assessment centres.
- Finally, our website’s new link to the Ontario Health West self-assessment tool, which is based on the provincial self-assessment tool and which is brought to us courtesy of the e-Health Centre of Excellence of Waterloo, can help streamline the assessment and referral for testing process.
  - It can make it easier for residents who are experiencing symptoms to connect with a primary care provider and ultimately get a referral to be tested at one of our assessment centres.
  - Of note: Since this tool is based on the Province’s self-assessment tool, if the latter has not yet been updated with the latest provincial guidance that opens up testing to all residents who are symptomatic, if you receive a message to self-isolate at home, remember... beginning today, all residents with symptoms in Waterloo Region are now eligible for testing.

## Conestoga Meats

- I wanted to provide an update on our public health investigation of cases at Conestoga Meats.
- Public Health is continuing to refer for testing any employees at Conestoga Meats who become symptomatic, and are reviewing the cases extensively.
- We are monitoring closely, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, to determine the effectiveness of the enhanced PPE and other safety procedures put in place prior to their reopening on May 4<sup>th</sup>.
- As a result of the tests that have continued to come in, as of May 14, we are at 75 positive cases among workers and 41 who have resolved.

- Public Health continues to work closely with the management at the plant, and as mentioned previously, they have implemented a significant number of preventative measures, meeting or exceeding recommendations from Public Health and the Ministry of Labour.
- Although we continue to see new cases, the number of positive reports have slowed.
- All of the cases we have seen so far were possibly exposed during the period prior to the re-opening, or may have been exposed in locations outside of Conestoga Meats
- While it is too early, at this point, to make any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the changes made to the plant, we have no indications at this time, there is an ongoing risk related to practices at the plant.
- The number of cases being reported have decreased and we are optimistic that the controls are having a positive impact.
- As we continue to receive and closely monitor new reports of positive cases, we will continue to assess the impact of the prevention measures in place in the plant.
- As mentioned previously, there continues to be the potential of outside influence for the transmission of the virus among the workers at Conestoga Meats as there is a considerable amount of social interaction between employees. Many live together and/or have carpooled together, which can increase the risk of transmission in environments external to Conestoga Meats.
- Conestoga Meats has worked with their employees to provide additional education and support on reducing the spread of COVID-19 at home.

## Closing Remarks

- I would like to thank our clinical testing partners. They have been working tirelessly to make this expansion possible.
- While we have seen our testing numbers increase significantly over the last weeks, it's also important to reiterate the effectiveness of public health measures.
- Testing is a surveillance tool that allows us to identify the virus is in our community and manage positive cases accordingly.
- But it does not **prevent** the virus.
- It is critical that everyone continues to practice public health measures, as we head into the long weekend and as more places begin to re-open
- This is not to say you must stay home
- Rather, when you do go out, whether it is for a walk or bike ride, or going to the grocery store I ask that you:
  - **Continue to only spend time with your household contacts**
  - **Do not gather in groups of more than 5**
  - **Keep 2 metres between yourself and others when you do go out**

- **I encourage you to wear non-medical, fabric masks or face coverings if 2 metres cannot be maintained – like at the grocery store or pharmacy**
- **And continue to wash your hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when water and soap are not available**
- These measures our best defence to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Let's continue to work together.
- Thank you.