COVID-19 Update

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Highlights

- Trends in Waterloo Region are increasing (similar to many other communities across Ontario).
  - We are entering a period of heightened risk over the next several weeks and few months, due to more indoor gatherings and greater circulation of COVID-19 in our community.
  - All residents should now consider COVID-19 to be circulating widely in our community.
- Given the increased risk in indoor environments, masking and good ventilation are two critical measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
  - Good ventilation can help reduce spread of COVID-19 in indoor spaces by preventing the accumulation of droplets or aerosols indoors.
  - A well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask continues to be essential to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is why I continue to recommend masking, especially in indoor environments, and even for those who are fully vaccinated, whenever they can.
  - These measures are essential components of our multi-layer defense against COVID-19, and need to combined with the other recommended public health measures.

Overall trends

- Trends in Waterloo Region are increasing, similar to many other communities across Ontario.
- As of yesterday afternoon’s update, we are managing 210 active cases and 12 active outbreaks.
- Our weekly case rate is now at 34 cases per 100,000 per week.
- We are also seeing concerning increases in our wastewater signal
  - The wastewater surveillance is an additional tool to help monitor for COVID-19 in our community.
- All residents should now consider COVID-19 to be circulating widely in our community.
• We are entering a period of heightened risk, due to this greater circulation of COVID-19 in our community, and more people spending more time indoors gathering with others outside of their immediate households.

Dashboard change

• Populations are dynamic and in order to reflect the changing and growing population in Waterloo Region. Similar to what we will be doing for the vaccine dashboard, we are updating the population denominator for our COVID-19 dashboard.
• Going forward, we will be using the Statistics Canada 2020 population estimate for Waterloo Region, which includes non-permanent residents, and increases our population denominator to 605,232 people.
• As a result, what you will see on the dashboard update this afternoon, is that some of our case rates will decrease slightly as a result of the slightly larger population denominator.

The Importance of Ventilation

• Ventilation is one of the layers in our “Swiss cheese”, multi-layer approach to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
• Good ventilation can help reduce spread of COVID-19 in indoor spaces by preventing the accumulation of droplets or aerosols indoors, and needs to be combined with other public health measures.
• Things to consider to improve indoor ventilation include:
  o Check that your HVAC is properly installed, inspected, and maintained
  o Increase the fresh air intake: Increase air-exchange settings on the HVAC system if possible, or open windows
  o Improve filtration: Use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system(s).
  o Consult with an expert, such as a knowledgeable HVAC contractor, on how to properly optimize your ventilation system.
• In addition to improving ventilation, be sure to:
  o Limit indoor gatherings to members of your immediate household whenever possible
  o When around people from outside your household:
    ▪ Maintain physical distance of at least 2 metres
    ▪ Wear a well-constructed, well-fitting mask
• Resources on ventilation are available on our COVID-19 website.

Recommendations for masking

• When layered with other recommended public health measures, a well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
• Make wearing a face covering or mask part of your regular routine.
• No matter what type you choose, proper fit is a key factor in its effectiveness.
• We are recommending all residents, whether you’re vaccinated or not, wear face coverings or masks in the following situations:
  o In shared spaces with people from outside your household
  o In all indoor environments, especially in enclosed spaces and settings with sub-optimal ventilation
    ▪ This includes settings where proof of vaccination is required and even if you are physically distanced, where possible.
  o In crowded settings, indoors or outdoors.

**Reminders for face coverings/ masks**
• The effectiveness of all types of face coverings, including medical and non-medical masks and respirators depends on: material, construction, fit and proper use
• Face coverings should fit well (with no gaps) and be comfortable to wear for long periods of time.
• Non-medical masks should have multiple layers, including at least two layers of breathable tightly woven fabric, such as cotton, with an effective middle filter layer.
• Medical masks may be more appropriate in certain settings where there is greater risk of infection or severe outcomes.
• Medical masks are recommended for:
  o Anyone who has tested positive for or has symptoms of COVID-19
  o People caring for someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19
  o People who live in an overcrowded setting with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19
  o People who are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19
  o People who are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their living situation
• Masking and good ventilation are two critical factors in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

**Closing remarks**
• We have seen before how fast COVID-19 can accelerate if we aren’t cautious.
• But we know what works and what we can each do to slow the spread in our community.
• We have the tools at our disposal to push back against COVID-19.
• Multiple layers of protection work together to reduce your risk for infection and your risk for serious illness.
• We can each take the steps to reduce the risk of spread by getting vaccinated and keeping up with important public health measures like wearing a well-fitting mask and improving indoor ventilation.
• Let’s keep working together to protect each other.
• Thank you.