



# COVID-19 Update

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

- Our indicators continue to be in line with the Red-Control level of the Ontario Framework
- Residents should consider that COVID-19 is broadly spreading in our community right now.
- Public Health continues to implement surge strategies to support case and contact management
- Public Health recommends Waterloo Region residents only gather with members of their own households for the holidays.

## Overall trends

- The spread of COVID-19 in our community continues to increase.
- Residents should consider that COVID-19 is broadly spreading in our community right now.
- Our indicators continue to place us with the Red-Control level of Ontario's Framework.
  - Our current weekly incidence rate is **70 cases** per 100,000.
  - Our current per cent positivity taking into account interim data is **3.3 per cent**.
  - Our reproductive rate has fluctuated between **0.9-1.2** over the past week.
  - We continue to experience a larger number of outbreaks, often in workplace and business settings with spread occurring between employees.
  - Hospital and ICU capacity
    - Hospitalizations continue to increase.
    - This represents a significant risk for local hospitals and their ability to keep all procedures going as planned.

## Case and Contact Update & Response

- Similar to other health units in the Red and Lockdown zones who have experienced surges, due to the acceleration of cases, contacts and growing number and complexity of case and outbreak investigations, we have been challenged to reach positive cases within 24 hours over the past week.
  - The percentage of cases we reach within 24 hrs has oscillated and averaged around 50% in the last week.
- We continue to implement strategies to address the surge including redeployment of staff and working to bring on automated processes where possible.
- The additional staff from the Province started orientation and training with us yesterday, and will be able to reinforce our case and contact management starting next week.
- Within Public Health, we have redeployed Public Health nurses from our call response team to improve our capacity to contact positive cases and identify high-risk contacts.
- This has impacted our process for public inquiries that require skilled staff. We will continue to follow-up with inquiries by email and phone. Residents with general or clinical questions about COVID-19 are encouraged to contact their health care provider or TeleHealth Ontario.
- Since PH may not be able to reach you within 24 hrs, and you may also see your results online before Public Health receives them, we are also advising all residents:
  - Check for your results online.
  - If you're positive, continue self-isolating.
  - If you are living with others, your household members should also immediately self isolate and seek testing.
  - If you have been in close contact with others - that is within 6ft and without a face covering for 15 min or more - within 48 hours of your symptom onset up until the time you self isolated, tell these other close contacts to self-isolate and get tested.
- Please take these actions while awaiting a call from Public Health.
- And even before you get a test result, follow the instructions provided to you by the testing centre.”

## Holiday gatherings

- Earlier this week, the Province issued advice for celebrating the holidays.
- Protect yourself and loved ones this holiday season by celebrating, in-person, with only your immediate household members or if you live alone, you may join one other household.
- Do not hold or attend large family dinners and big holiday dinners with family, friends and coworkers.
- I appreciate that this is challenging. Many of us are feeling frustrated and tired of having to stay apart from others.

- If given the opportunity, COVID-19 will spread like wildfire, and we know that it spreads easily indoors and in close contact interactions.
- This is what we continue to see with our current cases. Transmission is happening in social environments and when people are in close contact with others without distancing and masking.
- While our traditions may look a little different this year, we can still celebrate.
- By celebrating apart, you help protect yourself and loved ones.

## **Closing remarks**

- I appreciate that the new restrictions outlined under the Red-Control level of the Provincial Framework are significant for many in our community.
- I would like to be clear – the situation in Waterloo Region remains serious.
- The level of spread in our community continues to reach new highs.
- In addition to these restrictions which are necessary, it is also necessary for all of us in Waterloo Region to dramatically reduce our social interactions to help bring the spread of COVID-19 under control.
- If we do nothing, if as a community we do not aggressively reduce our social interactions, we will spiral into a Lockdown.
- Due to the growth in cases that has already occurred, it will get worse before it gets better.
- This is why it is imperative that we act now.
- These measures are difficult, but they are absolutely necessary.
- The longer we wait, the harder it will be and the longer it will take to wrestle our case numbers down.
- Your efforts and sacrifices are appreciated.
- Thank you for doing all that you can to help our community, right now.