



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

## COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Commissioner and Medical Officer of Health

Public Health and Emergency Services

November 6, 2020

### Overall trends

- In Waterloo Region, over the past week, our daily average number of new cases has increased.
  - In October our rates were often in the range of 15-20 cases per 100,000 per week and over the past week our rates have been between 20-25 cases per 100,000.
  - We are in the process of tabulating numbers for our 1:30 pm dashboard refresh so I don't have exact numbers for you, but I can tell him that **the numbers we report today will represent a significant jump from our average this last week.** There will be approximately double the number of new cases reported today than we have been seeing in the last week.
  - This is what we are concerned about with COVID. **When numbers increase, they can accelerate rapidly.**
  - **We will need to double down on our efforts to stick to the personal public health precautions we can each take to slow the spread of COVID-19.**
- The average rate of new cases for Ontario has also continued to increase, up to approximately 48 per 100,000 per week from 41 per 100,000 per week last week.
- In terms of what we've often seen drive our case numbers:
  - It is very similar to what we've seen elsewhere in Ontario, the genesis is often spread at events or gatherings, where people are not maintaining the precautions they should.
  - Then it's spread to their household contacts and family and friends.
  - Which then leads to an increase in cases in community settings like schools and workplaces and care homes.
  - Which further leads to spread and increases in household clusters and outbreaks. It's cyclical.

## Self-isolation and close contact

- Our team has put together an infographic to illustrate how cases can spread in settings where individuals are in close contact with others, without precautions such as distancing and face coverings.
- An individual with symptoms attended a large social gathering.
- Within a week, in Waterloo Region, 15 more confirmed cases and 33 high-risk contacts were identified. With more cases and contacts identified in other communities.
- If you are experiencing symptoms, even if they are only mild, stay home, self-isolate from others and schedule an appointment to be tested.
- When self-isolating at home, there are things you can do to limit spread within your home. **Spread among household contacts is the most common form of close contact spread.**
- Whether you are self-isolating because you are waiting for test results, have tested positive or have been identified as a high risk contact, follow these steps:
  - As much as possible, stay in a separate room away from other people in your home and use a separate bathroom if you have one. If you do not have a separate room, make sure that shared rooms have good airflow.
  - If you do not have access to a separate bathroom, disinfect the bathroom after use. Pay attention to high-touch areas – toilet, sink, countertops, and doorknobs.
  - If you are in a room with other people, keep a distance of at least 2 metres and wear a mask or face covering that covers your nose and mouth, and disinfect high touch areas/surfaces between uses.
- Practice proper respiratory etiquette:
  - Wash your hands thoroughly and often.
  - Avoid touching your face.
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Self-isolating and limiting close contact with others when you have symptoms helps to control the spread of COVID-19.

## Ontario Framework

- Earlier this week the Province announced a new framework for COVID-19 response.
- The framework outlines the key risk factors for COVID-19.
  - **Close contact is the highest risk.**
  - Other key risk factors include:
    - Prolonged exposure
    - Forceful exhalation, like when people are strenuously exercising

- Crowded places and closed spaces
  - Personal and public health measures — such as physical distancing, staying home when ill even with mild symptoms, frequent handwashing, and wearing a face covering — are key to limiting COVID-19 transmission.
  - It is critical that residents understand the risks of **gatherings** with people in **close contact**, especially in **enclosed/indoor spaces**, to understand how to mitigate those and make informed choices.
- The framework categorizes public health unit regions into five levels:
  - Green-Prevent
  - Yellow-Protect
  - Orange-Restrict
  - Red-Control, and
  - Lockdown being a measure of last and urgent resort
- The measures are designed to scale up or down as needed and be implemented progressively, level by level.
- As a community we need to be prepared for the possibility that **we may be placed in the yellow category when the Province approves the framework today.**
- If we are, **it would be to protect the gains we've made and help reduce the need for broader, stricter restrictions in the future.**

## Workplaces

- Our investigations in workplace settings continue to see a number of high-risk contacts as a result of a lack of measures in place in employee-only areas.
- Many workplaces ensure appropriate public health measures are in place, in areas where clients or patrons may be present but the same precautions are not always applied consistently in employee-only areas.
- We continue to identify issues with physical distancing and masks.
- We have heard from the Province that they will be assisting regions with outreach, education and enforcement with respect to workplaces and we will be working with them on this issue.

## Concluding remarks

- I appreciate how challenging and difficult this year has been.
- I want to acknowledge all the efforts and hard work of so many in our community who have made sacrifices to help protect our community.
- Thank you for all of your efforts.
- Your actions can and do make a difference.
- We need to keep going. We need to continue to work together, and help protect one another.