



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

## COVID-19 Update

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Public Health and Emergency Services  
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### Highlights

- This week, we continue to see the relative stability in our local trends that we have seen for a number of weeks.
- We know that the activity associated with holiday weekends tends to increase the risk of transmission through close contact.
- Please do not let your guard down this Thanksgiving weekend. COVID-19 is still with us.
- COVID-19 continues to spread when we are in close contact with each other. Those who are unvaccinated are the most vulnerable to illness, admission to the ICU, and death.

### Overall trends

- This week, we continue to see the relative stability in our local trends that we have seen for a number of weeks.
- Since the announcement that Ontario is introducing a vaccine certificate later this month, there has been an uptick in first-dose vaccinations.
- In Waterloo Region, we are entering the fall in a better scenario because of this increase in first doses.
  - Very close to 90% of residents aged 12 and older have had a first dose.
  - Approximately 85% of residents aged 12 and older have had a second dose.
  - Third doses have been given to residents of all long-term care facilities.
- I would sincerely like to thank everyone who is fully vaccinated. And anyone who recently decided to get a first dose. (Please get a second dose too.)
- If you are not vaccinated yet, and you are eligible, I strongly encourage you to reduce your risk of illness, hospitalization or death from COVID-19. Please get the vaccine for your own protection and to protect those you love.

## Thanksgiving health precautions

- This Thanksgiving weekend it is important to continue to practice public health guidelines as COVID-19 still poses a serious risk if allowed to spread, particularly to those who are unvaccinated.
- Please do not host or attend a gathering this weekend if you are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild. Get tested if you are sick.
- It is safest to gather with your own household, or a small group of people you know are fully vaccinated.

## The Swiss Cheese Model

- To protect yourself from COVID-19 and participate in activities this weekend, remember the layered approach to protection – what is often referred to as the Swiss Cheese Model:
  - A layered approach (like layered slices of Swiss cheese) results in fewer holes.
  - The strongest layer comes from being vaccinated.
  - You can also protect yourself by wearing a face covering, physically distancing, keeping gatherings small, and spending time outdoors or only in well-ventilated indoor spaces.
  - Each of these layers reduces your risk of COVID-19 but they are most effective when you combine them.

## Rapid antigen screening in schools

- Earlier this week, the Province announced that targeted rapid antigen screening will be made available for select schools and licensed child care centres, if and when recommended by a local medical officer of health.
- The tests would then be made available to those schools or child care centres by the Province.
- Rapid antigen screening may be useful in higher-risk situations, such as where there are higher rates of COVID-19, lower rates of vaccination and a history of outbreaks in the school or child care centre.
- We are currently working with the Province and other public health units on more specific criteria that can be used to identify which schools and child care centres may benefit from having this additional screening tool made available to them.
- We are also working with our local school boards and child care providers to come up with a process to implement rapid antigen screening, if and when it's recommended.
- As announced by the Province, participation in rapid antigen screening will be for unvaccinated, asymptomatic children, and it will be voluntary.
- Rapid antigen testing cannot be used to test symptomatic children to determine whether they should attend school. I know some parents are wondering if this could replace taking their child to a testing centre if they have symptoms, especially if they are mild. It cannot.
- Any one who has symptoms needs to get a lab-based (PCR) test at one of the testing centres.

- It also cannot be used, at this time, to test high-risk contacts of a case that have been dismissed due to a case in their class. These high-risk contacts also need to obtain a lab-based (PCR) test at one of the testing centres.
- Rapid antigen screening also would not replace any of the other public health measures required for school or child care settings. It would be an added layer of screening.
- Anyone who tests positive on a rapid antigen screen should not attend school and should get a lab-based (PCR) test at one of the testing centres.
- At this time, we do not have any school or child care facilities where we have concerns about an elevated risk or ongoing risk of spread.
- However, we want to be ready so that these tests are available to parents if and when they'd be recommended.
- To that end, we will provide more information as soon as we have it regarding program parameters.

## **Closing remarks**

- I would like to thank the residents of Waterloo Region for stepping up in such large numbers to be vaccinated.
- I would also like to thank everyone in the community in advance for doing their part and continuing to practice public health precautions this holiday weekend to protect loved ones and our broader community.
- It is because of you that we are able to do many more activities than we were at this same time last year. Thank you for caring for one another.
- Please be safe.