



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
EMERGENCY SERVICES

COVID-19 Update

Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang, Commissioner of Public Health and Emergency Services

September 15, 2020

Overall Trends

- We have seen an increase in the number of new infections reported in Waterloo Region in the last week.
- As we've seen an increase locally, the number of new cases reported provincially continues to rise and has reached a level we had not seen for over three months.
- As of this morning's dashboard update, there are 68 active cases in Waterloo Region.
- A total of 77,875 tests have been performed in Waterloo Region with positive results for 2.0 per cent of all tests.
- There is currently one active outbreak in a long-term care setting. There are currently no outbreaks in other congregate care settings, workplaces or schools.
- Although there are no other outbreaks at this time, among our recent cases, we have seen clusters (linked cases) in households and social groups.
- In the last week, COVID-19 has been diagnosed most frequently in the 10-19, 20-29, and 40-49-year-old age groups
- We have seen in our case investigations a trend of cases having notably more high risk contacts than before.
- This means people are socializing and gathering in close contact with people significantly more than before, without precautions such as physical distancing or wearing face coverings.

Getting back on track

- Our recent increase in community spread and the loosening of precautions when interacting with others is cause for concern.
- As we've seen, cases can rise quickly. COVID-19 spreads easily.
- Increasing spread of COVID-19 increases the risk of cases and outbreaks occurring in settings such as schools, workplaces and congregate care homes.
- We need to re-commit to our public health practices.
- We should not expand our 'social bubbles' beyond 10 people. This is still the recommendation in Ontario. With everyone else, we should practice physical distancing and wearing a face covering.
- This does not mean one group of 10 people at a family gathering, another group of 10 people at a social gathering, and another group of 10 for a night on the town. It's the same 10 people or less all the time for our 'social bubble'.
- With others outside of our 'social bubble', we need to practice physical distancing and wear a face covering (if physical distancing can be a challenge or if required by the Regional bylaws).
- I have heard of confusion regarding the 50-person indoor and 100-person outdoor limit.
- If we are in such a gathering, with people outside of our 'social bubble', we need to practice physical distancing and wear a face covering (if physical distancing can be a challenge or if required by the Regional bylaws)
- We also need to self-isolate from others, seek testing, and stay at home if we have symptoms. We've had cases decide to still gather with others when they were slightly symptomatic, thinking it would be fine. They spread it to others.
- Our actions today will impact what we will see in the coming weeks.
- As a community, we all have a role to play and we are stronger when we work together.

School protocol

- I appreciate that there are still questions about how cases in schools are detected and managed.
- We have worked very closely with our school boards on the implementation of their return to school plans.
- With respect to cases identified in schools, Public Health receives all positive test results and once we receive the results, our staff begin what is called case and contact management.
 - This is done for each and every case reported to Public Health.

- Public Health staff conduct an investigation to determine who had close contact with the individual during the infectious period.
- Public Health then contacts each person who has been identified by the investigation and we direct them on self-isolation and testing, as appropriate.
 - Individuals who have not had close contact with a confirmed case will not be contacted by Public Health, but are required to continue to self-monitor, screening daily for symptoms, and to stay home and seek testing if symptoms develop.
- The definition for an outbreak in a school is two or more confirmed cases, with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection in the school.
 - More simply, when there is more than one case identified in a school, Public Health investigates to determine whether the cases are connected, and whether transmission to at least one of the cases could have occurred in the school setting.
- If an outbreak is declared in the school, Public Health will determine which cohort(s) will need to be sent home, and we will work with the school board to communicate to the impacted school community.

Face covering by-law recommendation

- A staff recommendation is being made to Region of Waterloo Council to extend the face covering by-laws until May 2021.
- I continue to be supportive of the Regional by-laws, requiring face coverings in enclosed public places and on transit.
- The by-laws further support my strong recommendation that people wear masks when physical distancing can be a challenge, especially in such settings.
- Influenza circulates in Ontario in the fall, winter, and spring. COVID-19 is circulating and the risk of spread could be increased during the fall, winter and spring of 2020-2021.
- Together with other public health practices, face coverings will continue to be an important measure to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.